

Negotiating refugization in Beldangi

National identity and search for normality in a refugee
camp community

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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to understand the daily life in a refugee camp and to look at the problems and issues faced by the Bhutanese refugees. The refugees are in the middle of an ongoing resettlement process that will disperse the Nepali Bhutanese diaspora from the refugee camps in southern Nepal to several different countries in the west. Their struggle with defining themselves within the context of the refugee camp is the focus of the thesis. It takes aim to describe ethnic, caste and religious relations in the camp community as well as the importance of work and maintaining a stable mind through activity and family connections.

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Introduction

We went to Damak and visited a refugee doctor. Vivek said that he would be able to tell me much about the history of the refugees and the camps. The doctor had been among the first to go to Nepal and he was one of the early leaders of the refugees. He told me of the horrible conditions in the first months. People got ill from diseases and were not used to the climate and the dangerous animals found in the jungle. Food and shelter were scarce and every day was a struggle to get firewood and other necessities. Many died. One time they even found a whole family dead. They adapted and learned from the difficulties. As more people arrived from Nepal, they moved to a better-suited area and set up a more organized camp. They appealed for support from the world community. The doctor emphasized that the refugees had established the camps themselves and the help came later.

In 1990, large groups of Bhutanese of Nepalese descent started their exodus from their homeland, going through India and setting up camps in the southeastern part of Nepal. Many of them had never before been outside Bhutan and struggled to survive in the unfamiliar environment of the hot and humid Terai region. They had brought few belongings when they left their homes. They told stories of intimidation, torture and forced eviction by the Authorities from their farms and houses. The government had enforced their policy of getting rid of what they referred to as anti-nationals (Ngolops), and illegal immigrants (Hutt, 2003, s. 214). Since then, the refugees have lived in camps while the leaders of Nepal and Bhutan have failed to reach an agreement about what should be done. Nepal has gone through a civil war and abolished the monarchy, Bhutan has introduced democracy by royal decree, after which the former king voluntarily abdicated, and the US, together with a group of other western countries has offered to receive the well over one hundred thousand refugees in a massive resettlement program. In the midst of this, the refugees find themselves in a situation where belonging and identity must be constantly renegotiated. Just like other refugee diasporas and nations, there is a tendency is to look to history for explaining current issues. It is not as much a controlled process as a series of connections to people, ideas and things that form a sense of identity.

Most of the leaders in the political movement for democracy in 1990 have resettled, and though many in the camp still want to return, it is mostly family relations and not the refugee community as a socio-political entity that maintains connections within the camp. How they

deal with the liminal status of their identities varies a lot, and I have only scratched a tiny part of the surface of what refugees do to maintain their identity. What is true for the refugees in Beldangi is not necessarily so for other refugees in the world. However, one thing that is transferrable to other refugee situations in the world is a central paradox of refugee existence: Being refugees entitles people to - and simultaneously demands of them - things that contrasts radically with what their identity as citizens of their original country prescribed. In this sense, their identity, for which they have had to flee in this case, is slowly altered and threatens to wash away over time. Both the literal distance from the old life, the things forgotten by the passing of generations, and the resistance to these very processes, lead to an increasingly defining refugee identity. This identity is neither a placeholder nor a substitute for national identity but an added layer that mixes and contrasts with it.

The Refugees are prohibited from returning to Bhutan. Nepal is not in a good condition to receive them, though most of the refugees would not accept this in any case, seeing it as an imperative not to be taken as Nepalese but Bhutanese. Since 2007, the refugees have been in a process of third country resettlement (TCR), and as a result, many refugee families have been moved by the IOM to Beldangi from the other camps as the population shrank and the other camps closed. When I was there only Beldangi and Sanichare, a camp about an hour away, remained. Of the 107000 refugees, 78528 had already gone to third countries. Most went to the US, some of them were sent to Canada, Australia and a few were sent to New Zealand, Denmark, The Netherlands, Norway and the UK. With the white busses from the International Organization of Migration (IOM) leaving the camp filled with refugees every week, many huts are left empty, used by new families or torn down to make room for other things such as vegetable gardens or volleyball courts.

Resettled refugees by destination country:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| US – 66243 | Canada – 5376 |
| Australia – 4191 | New Zealand – 747 |
| Denmark – 749 | Norway – 546 |
| UK – 350 | The Netherlands – 326 |

(UNHCR, 2013)

The purpose of this thesis is not to break ground in our understanding of refugees in general or uncover any hidden truth about the Bhutanese refugees. I merely intend to show how some

of the refugees handle their lives in the extraordinary setting of refugee camp life and too see what is important to them in negotiating identity. Since living with the implications of the refugee camp is not considered a normal state of affairs, recreating an idea of normality becomes an important goal. The refugees use several strategies to meet this challenge, and I will focus on these aspects of their situation: Family, religion and ethnicity, the moral importance of work, the dangers of idleness, history remembering and the generation gap. I will also discuss what the Nepali Bhutanese do in anticipation of the ongoing resettlement coordinated by the UN.

Outline of chapters

In the first chapter, I will give a glimpse of the physical world and the history of the refugee camp as I found it. Then I will focus on the family and give a picture of what the family unit means through my experience of being introduced and incorporated as sort of honorary member. I will also describe my methods, the kind of access I had and the reason for some of the choices I made. In the second chapter, I focus on different units of classification other than the national and their importance in defining identity. Of many possible things to highlight, chose to write about family and belonging to caste, ethnic groups and religious groups.

Although the refugees are gathered as a group and live as they do because of the national aspect of their identity, it is not the only side of them and for some other things play a more important role in defining identity. The third chapter is about the use of time in the refugee community. I will outline a range of activities that refugees did for economic gain or passing time and show how they are tied both to a morality of the use of time and a need to reestablish a sense of living a normal life. An important reason for keeping busy was a sincere concern for the dangers of idleness. The feared consequences of this is the focus of the fourth chapter. There is a problem with depression and suicide in the camps. The culture of maintaining face may prohibit individuals from seeking help and a stigma against mentally depressed people provide a strong motivation to stay busy within the social codes of the camp community. I will attempt to see this in light of the ongoing resettlement process and look at some of its effects. In the fifth and last chapter, I will return to the sense of identity in the refugee camp community. I will also look at how this relates to national identity in the traditional sense. I want to shed some light on what effects the process of resettlement has on this sense of

identity and how the refugees conceptualize and make sense of resettlement and their place in the system. I have also included my experience of visiting my family from the fieldwork in their new home in America about a year after the end of my return from Beldangi. It is mainly intended to give insight into what kind of life awaits the refugees when they have resettled.

1 Welcome to Bel City

The field, history, access, ethics and method

1.1 Entering Beldangi

As I climbed on top of the bus to go to Beldangi for the first time, a group that already sat there showed me where I could sit. I started talking to them. I was surprised to find that nearly all the people on that bus were actually refugees. My ignorance seems strange to me now, but as I had never even seen a refugee camp, I had many misconceptions. I envisioned a place where people stayed inside and did not commute to town, maybe not always being allowed to go outside for security or administrative reasons. I certainly did not expect the refugees to have jobs outside the camp. A man in a suit sitting on the roof told me he had business in Damak. He was interested in what I was doing and offered that I would come by his hut and see how he and his family lived the next day. Although I never found him in his hut, this initial meeting gave me a hint about the degree of hospitality I would be met with later in Beldangi. This was literally the first person from the camp I talked with, and I had already been invited to visit a home.

I spent some of the first trips to the camp with a Nepali assistant from Kathmandu, walking a lot around to get the lay of the land, as it were. We visited the administration office buildings in the center where we met with the deputy camp secretary in the hope of seeing some data sheets or maps we could use. The camp secretary was unfortunately busy in a meeting. His deputy was a young woman who had just been elected. She told us that though she would try to help us with information, she was inexperienced in her new job and was afraid she would be unable to answer all our queries. She seemed to be stressed because of this, so we went out to wait for the meeting to end. A young man outside was interested in what we were doing. He spoke good English and said that he could help us later if we needed some information or help finding people. He had helped a researcher before. His help would indeed be good to have later. While waiting outside the offices, my assistant began talking with a man with a bicycle coming past. His voice had a distinctly low and cautious tone. Sudip spoke some English and he told me that we could accompany him to his hut. He was a sub-sector head, a role he explained as: “I look after 52 huts”. The people of the sector elected him to represent them and take care of paperwork and distribution of rationed soap, etc. He was also part of the

Camp Watchman Team (CWT) who oversee the camps safety, in part by patrolling at night, and help in mediation of conflicts in meetings¹. We walked there, greeted his mother and wife, sat down on a bed and had tea. For me, that was when I first felt that I was truly in the field. I knew, then, that it was in people's huts, not in administrative offices, I would gain access to interesting data about the Bhutanese refugee way of life. He told me about a British man who had been in the camp before over an extended period. He was a volunteer and had been close friends with Sudip and his best friend, who already had been resettled to Norway. He explained with great sincerity how they used to sit on the floor of his hut, drink tea, and "share" (stories or thoughts). He emphasized the importance of "sharing" among friends to keep close and avoid being troubled by hardship. I noticed how he did not say that someone resettled, but rather had been resettled. Later, I noticed this among other refugees as well. It seemed that the refugees had a sense that external forces outside of their influence controlled them. Like elsewhere in the country, the Nepali sense of fatalism, described in detail by Nor Bahadur Bista (Fatalism and Development, 1991) was a defining part of how individuals spoke about their circumstances. At the same time, the interpretation of one's fate was not immune to change but could vary from time to time as the circumstances changed. Naturally, things had changed drastically several times for the refugees.

1.2 Background history

Beldangi Refugee camp is the largest of five camps established by Nepali Bhutanese refugees in the early 90s². After the initial period, struggling to survive on their own, during which many people died of disease, the UNHCR became involved and helped to organize the camp. This was only after much time and effort by the refugee community leaders had been aimed at getting support for their camp. They primarily needed medicines and proper shelter, as many got ill because the hot climate of the Terai was very different from what they were used to in the foothills of Bhutan. The refugee doctor in Damak told me about this period in detail. He stressed that it was the refugees themselves, not the UN, that had initiated many of the

¹ Though they are not a police force, they patrol the camp at night and call upon the police if needed. The police never enter the actual camp from their neighboring base unless called upon.

² These camps were Timai, Sanichare, Beldangi, Khudnabari and Goldhap.

services in the camps. He explained that these responsibilities were later more or less voluntarily handed over to the UN. He felt that outsiders had gotten too much of the credit for this early work. One of many such examples was the school system, begun by refugee teachers who held classes for children in the shade of trees before school huts could be put up.

In 1992, they expanded Beldangi so that it now consists of three parts. There are many relief organizations and NGOs operating in the camp. Many represented by white SUVs with large blue letter abbreviations on them. Among the most important were UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) who was in charge of running the camp, and IOM (International Organization of Migration), who is in charge of the resettlement process. The actual administration of the camp was handled by the CMC (Camp Management Committee), which was the democratically elected representatives for the refugees. By having such a political body within the clear borders of the camp, one could be forgiven for seeing the camp as a kind of state in and of itself, or maybe an autonomous district within the Nepalese borders. The connection to Nepal was through the RCU (Refugee Co-ordination Unit), which oversaw camp administration for the Nepalese government. They also had an office by the CMC office.

The oldest part of camp, Beldangi 1, was separated from Bel 2 by a few hundred meters of forest, open field and bushes. Bel 2 was the location of the camp administration, the police station, the AMDA health post and other offices. On the other side of the main camp road is Bel 2 extension, commonly called Beldangi 3. This is the smallest and newest part. The three parts are in many respects considered separate camps despite their proximity. When you enter the camp from the road leading to the nearby town of Damak, you start from a long row of shops, stalls and western union signs. This place is called Bangay bazar and is where the bus stops. You head through a bamboo gate guarded by a police sentry with a machine gun. The Nepali Armed Police Force (APF) has a camp just inside the gates. They are seldom seen outside, and I never saw them stop anyone going in or out of the camp to check papers. By the road are vendors of grilled corn, medicinal herbs and roots, snacks and sugar cane juice. The road is a very broad dirt road leading north in a straight line. Further in on your left are stockpiles of bamboo building materials, warehouses, offices of LWF (Lutheran World Federation), Caritas Nepal and, of course, row upon row of bamboo huts. On your right, as you enter, the huts seem newer. The bamboo has a lighter color, there is more space between huts and it looks more orderly. This is because the inhabitants are better off, quite the opposite

actually. This area of the camp burned to the ground December 4, 2012, destroying everything the refugees there had brought from Bhutan or saved up for in the twenty years as refugees. Further, down the road there was an open area used as a cricket pitch and for other hobbies and activities. There was also a big football field on the opposite side of the camp where youth organizations organized teams to play matches. Beyond this there was forest, some farms, two parallel rivers and hills to the north marking the beginning of the Himalayas.

1.3 Having an assistant and what it delineates

After the first trip to the camp, my assistant had to go back to Kathmandu, so I went to the camp alone. After failing to find the hut of the previously mentioned man from the bus roof, I instead met Bishal, who offered to show me around a few places. We went to his hut, where we sat down and had tea. His old mother proudly showed me a picture of the King of Bhutan she had kept. He told me about a newspaper that he had worked for that wrote about refugee issues. It had been inactive for a while because it had printed a piece by a refugee who had resettled in the Netherlands and wanted to warn others not to go there as he felt it was not a good place for them to live. The piece had caused some problems with the UN organizations in the camp. While we were there, we got a visit by an old man who copied our movements and sounds. He did not speak any language but thought it was really funny just to copy us. The old man may have been partly deaf. Later we went around and visited several other people and organizations. Bishal spoke good English and could translate what people said just as well as my assistant could.

The next day, I tried to contact him, but got no answer, so I went to the center of the camp and sat down on a bench outside the CMC. The area around the CMC was a place where many people came to meet. There were benches around a large old trees and groups of people sitting in the shade talking. As I sat on a bench, I noticed a young woman and a young man sitting under a tree talking. I approached them and asked if I could join them. They let me join, and told me that they were both students and sometimes met to discuss current affairs. As we were talking, a few people came to listen to our discussion, some of them contributing with their views or just nodding. One of the people was Ganesh Rai. After the two students had gone home, he offered for me to come and have dinner with his family. On the way to his hut, I

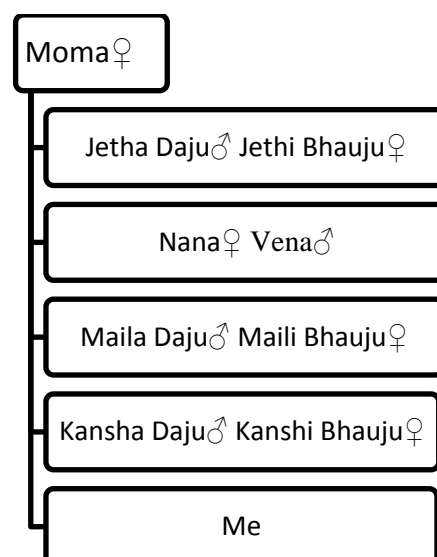
explained a bit about what I was trying to do in the camp and my hope of maybe eventually staying inside the camp instead of commuting. He immediately offered that I could stay in his hut, if I felt secure. He wanted to make sure I was feeling safe in the camp, because there had been some crime, particularly at night, and other foreign workers seldom stayed for long in the camp. I happily accepted the invitation.

After visiting Ganesh's hut, meeting his family and having dinner with them, I agreed that I would come back the next day to stay in an extra room that they had. Regrettably, other things got in the way and I was unable to get there the following day. The day after, we went to the camp and found Ganesh's hut and his family around the huts. They looked a little disappointed that I had not come the day before as I had promised. They were interested in speaking to my assistant however, since he spoke Nepali and could explain why we were there and answer other questions. I waited to let them to speak uninterrupted for a while though I could not follow the conversation properly. I was hoping that my assistant would be able to translate some of their discussion later, but to my frustration, I got only a small part of the discussion. It also seemed filtered somehow. I had originally wanted to avoid using an interpreter because of the filtering it necessarily entails (Berreman, 1962). The dynamic of this type of engagement did not seem to work, so later I stayed most of the time alone in the camp without the assistant. In retrospect, I think it was probably methodically sound to keep my presence in the camp a lonely walk. Being in need of help, in need of friends and need of things to do provided a more natural and open social arena to engage with people and not being bogged down in a set time schedule and formal interactions.

1.4 Becoming family

Vered Amit, in his book "Realizing Community", points to the "visceral nature of communities that these are not coldly calculated contracts, but embodied, sensual and emotionally charged affiliations" (2002, p. 16). While their nationality is no longer officially recognized by the actual nation that they claim membership to, the refugees are still there and have to make a life for themselves in the refugee community regardless of their political status.

After spending the day in the camp, guided around by Sudip, I was invited by the Rai family to have dinner at Mon Maya's hut with her, Ganesh and Phul Maya. Mon Maya was the mother of the three sons Ran Bahadur, Vivek and Ganesh. She also had a daughter who lived with her husband and daughter in another part of the camp called Roshni. Coming into Mon Maya's hut, they invited me to sit down and gave me a large plate of dal bhat with pork curry, curd, saag, papadums and tongba afterwards. The others, it seemed, had already eaten. Later, I learned that this was not everyday food. In fact, it was quite a feast. They kept me company while I ate, asking questions and making sure that my plate was never empty. They were amused to see me eating with my hands and trying to speak Nepali to the best of my limited ability. Afterwards, Ganesh showed me a spare bed that I could use. After the meal, Mon Maya told me that I was her son and I could call her "Moma", which is the Rai language version of "mom". When I met her in the future, I should also use the Rai/Limbu greeting "sewaro". The standard Nepali equivalents would be "Ama" and "Namaste". She then pointed at the others present and told me what their respective title would be for me. Later, they would sometimes remind me of the familial titles I should use, but most of the time it was fine to use their names. Daju is eastern dialect for big brother and Bhauju means sister-in-law. Nana is sister and Vena brother-in-law. They are differentiated by age as the names of the five fingers of the hand: Jetho (eldest), mailo (middle), sailo, kailo, and Kansho (youngest). Accordingly, my immediate family (children omitted) would look something like this:



Sabina, who was a neighbor and a distant relative, came by and we took some group pictures with my mobile phone. She was living next door with her little sister and their mother, who was also the Partinidi (sub-sector head). They were also part of the family. The pictures

looked funny since it was completely dark and the flash blinded us. Looking at these and other pictures on the phone later became a frequent point of conversation with Mon Maya. I also had some pictures of my family, which was greatly appreciated. They were concerned for me having to live away from my family, though I told them that I had gotten by on my own for many years. Ganesh showed me a tiny shrine in Mon Maya's room. It was common to pray at home every day before starting the day. In the room, there was also a big wooden chest, which her late husband, Ram Chandra, had brought from Bhutan. After a while, Vivek came in and said: "Now we should go pay a visit to our jethi daju". We went to Ran Bahadur's hut and sat for a while outside his hut playing cards and talking. When it was time to sleep, I went back to Ganesh's hut and found that someone already had fixed the mosquito net for me. As I was falling asleep, the sounds of cockroaches, mice, termites, beetles, and lizards kept me awake for a while. The first couple of nights I stayed in the camp, I stayed in Ganesh's extra room. I also met his two brothers again as well as many other relatives and friends stopping by to buy milk or, sometimes, just curiosity. Outsiders seldom stayed in the camp overnight. A couple of days later, Vivek, who was living closest to Ganesh, told me that I could stay with them too. They had three kids and I thought it might be interesting to see a different household. Ganesh told me I should stay there the next day, so I did. I mostly stayed in Vivek's hut from then on until I left.

An added methodological benefit of staying at Vivek and Bachala Maya's hut was the fact that they sold milk, meaning that several people would come by the hut every day that I might talk to and get to know. In addition, it meant that there would be work to be done, that I could help with. I was overwhelmed by how lucky I had been to be allowed into the household like that. Though it was a goal for me to live with a family, it was something I had thought I would be working toward for a long time and possibly never achieve. I decided to keep going with the flow and just do things that might give more insight and access to the refugee mindset and thoughts. I tried to take initiative in partaking in the different daily activities of the family, as well as engaging in lengthy conversations with whomever came by. Finding people to talk to was not a challenge, since many came to me to talk, invited me for tea, but trying to remember every name and conversation became hard. Vivek once told me that I should not idly accept invitations to visit, as I would be expected the next day by the person's family and they would be greatly disappointed if I did not show up. This made things clearer for me because I had taken the many invitations as acts of courtesy it would be rude to refuse. I had underestimated the importance of the meal itself. Having someone over for dinner is not

merely a setting facilitating bonding through conversation (though that was part of it); the eating of their food in itself was the bond.

The experience of becoming family brought to memory the story of the Kapluna Daughter (Briggs, 1970), in that I was brought in as an adoptee who needed shelter and protection. Like Briggs's informants, mine felt a responsibility to help me and protect me. Not from the cold and unforgiving conditions but from bad people and criminals in the refugee camp itself. Apart from the gender difference, an important difference from her experience was that my new family did not expect me to be "docile and helpful" (Briggs, 1970, s. 25). On the contrary, sometimes when I asked if I could help with forming bits of coal, accompany my brother to feed the pigs, dust the yard or carry water, they would say that I did not have to do it or that I could write notes instead. The custom was, they told me, that guests should relax and eat, while family members should contribute in their household. In other words, I was somewhere between categories. Getting through this categorical membrane of family was what I thought I should try to do, though getting halfway and perhaps stuck somewhere in the middle was a more realistic description of what actually happened.

1.5 Language

"Good morning, Moma! How are you feeling today?" I said to my adopted mother one early morning. "I am very good thank you! You are speaking Nepali now! That is good!" she said, looking a little surprised and happy. "Yes. Slowly, slowly I learn" I responded, happy to have understood her entire reply for once. "You only speak Nepali from now on!"

Much of the contact I had with people was through conversations. A big challenge in this regard was the language. To break this barrier, I had taken one month of intensive language course in Kathmandu. Limited though it was, it proved crucial to my observations in the camp. I chose to focus on practical conversational Nepali and grammatical rules, as I anticipated that vocabulary would be the easiest to learn from people I met in the camp. I also skipped learning the Devanagari alphabet as I realized that I needed to prioritize practical spoken language because of the time restraints. Many people knew some English, but seldom used it, saying they were not good enough. The three brothers I spent most of my time with could speak English and helped me understand a lot. Their kids and my friends Sudip, the

sub-sector head, and Bishal, the freelance research assistant, also helped me with language. Had I not been in a place where English was widely known, I would have needed much better knowledge of the local language. Many researchers are scared away from doing fieldwork where they will need to learn a foreign language. On the one hand, one could argue there is not enough time to learn it properly, and in one way that is right. On the other hand, not comprehending everything that people say does not make fieldwork impossible to conduct. It can even sometimes be advantageous if people are interested in teaching you things.

Learning the Nepali language while in the field was probably one of the most rewarding parts of the time in Beldangi. Every day was a series of new challenges. Some days I barely had any time outside of conversations, and learning is fast when you constantly talk to people. As I had hoped, I was able to use the learning of words as a way to connect with many people who were more than willing to help me understand and use their beautiful language. Knowing some language, and showing a genuine interest in learning more Nepali definitely helped, along with staying for long periods inside the camp, to put me in a different category from people from outside with specific goals and interests like western volunteers and UN workers.

1.6 Types and levels of observation

Coming to the camp, the presence of the UN and international NGOs was very visible. However, there was a marked absence of people associated with these organizations from abroad in the camp. The reason for this may partly be that the office of the UNHCR and the IOM was located in the city center of Damak, and not in Beldangi itself. Foreign workers would sometimes come into the camp in their big, white SUVs with large, blue initials on them, but my impression was that they would seldom stay for longer than they had to. Furthermore, many of the workers were refugees themselves, locals or in some cases Indian. Although they often seemingly tried to purposely stand out from the refugees, wearing sunglasses and waiting inside or close to their fancy, air-conditioned cars instead of talking to people in the camp. Many of them looked Nepalese or Indian. I had envisioned more of the workers to be from other countries in a refugee camp with a heavy presence of NGOs. Because there were so few foreigners, I stood out from the crowd more than I had thought I would. I met two Americans while I was there. One was actually doing ethnography for her

PhD while volunteering in a spoken English learning center, while the other was involved with a church group for refugees who had resettled in the US. Strangers often mistook me for a missionary to, one example being a shopkeeper who told me there was a rumor that I was involved with one of the churches outside the camp.

I had considered, and been advised to contact some of the NGOs operating in the camp, and ask them to let me volunteer as a means to gaining entry and access to people's lives. This idea seemed to be smart, and would undoubtedly made my application to the UNHCR to do research in the camp seem more legitimate, but I had an aversion from doing so for a number of reasons. I anticipated there to be a hidden barrier between volunteers and the refugees. I believed that important aspects of the daily lives of people would be purposely obscured to the representatives of 'officialdom', in the same sense as described by Mueggler (2001). In his book, the Chinese authorities are seen as powerful, mystical forces beyond the control of the villagers in southwest China, and activities forbidden by those forces must be done clandestinely. In a similar way, the representatives of the world community in the camp are outsiders with foreign rules and schemes that must be followed while any non-sanctioned activity must be kept secret. The framework of the refugee camp was simultaneously a source of commonality and a point of differentiation for the refugees as a group. I felt that having a set agreement with an NGO would limit my freedom to pursue and identify such things and other things I would find interesting along the way. It would instead tie me to the place and people I met through the NGO. I wanted to keep my options open by making time available instead of having to spend large amounts of time doing arbitrary tasks for an NGO. That is not to say that such a fieldwork could not result in some interesting results, but I wished to decide how I spent my time so that I could go with people to places, investigate things that came up, or partake in activities and experiences at any hour of the day. Being just a student without any formal attachment to an organization made me something of a new category in the camp. My hope in doing so was that people would see me more as a person than a representative and thereby build trust and rapport. I would obviously not know if somebody successfully kept important things about their daily life secret from me, but at least I was told of some of the things not sanctioned by the administration, like alcohol sale and electricity being forwarded to the camp. A rumor also claimed that the power line had recently been cut in order for the new chief of police in the camp to display leverage to receive the same bribe as his predecessor. It should be noted that rumors of corruption was rather common in Nepal. True

or not, such rumors give an insight to the relations within the camp that are not necessarily shared with outsiders.

1.7 Data collection and Ethics

Regarding data collection and the writing of field notes, I had made some conscious choices before I arrived. Wrote the notes by hand in a big book even though I had my laptop with me. The idea behind this was to lower the threshold for writing something down, prompting entries that are more frequent. It would also make it easier for me to draw illustrations of things, maps and relational overviews of people, places, actions, organizations and so on. I also thought that it would be better to use a method independent of electricity, as there are many daily power cuts in Nepal in general and especially in the camp. After some thought, I decided to write the notes in Norwegian. The main reason for this was that it allowed me to write more openly and frankly than I would if I wrote in English, as people generally had some understanding of English and would theoretically be able to read my notes if I left them somewhere. In my mind, this could potentially cause problems if somebody took offence by what I had written, or indeed not written. Although there were only a few times people tried to read my notes, I still felt it was worth it because I might have censored myself, subconsciously or otherwise, had I written it in English. In a couple of instances, some of my informants asked me what I was writing, pointing in my book and asking me to translate particular passages. This was no big concern, however, as I think it was because of my strange language and not concerns about the content. Phul Maya once even asked me to read a passage aloud in Norwegian just to hear it.

The writing itself proved to be more challenging than I thought it would be, given the constant dilemma between participation and writing notes. I generally prioritized participation whenever I had to choose, and because of this, I often found myself making up for days of not writing at a time. Writing daily in a separate diary was extremely helpful. Writing notes as soon as possible after something happens is a well-known ideal in anthropology, the aim being to make notes that are as experience-near as possible (Wikan, 1991). To complement the ordinary field notes, I therefore sometimes used scratch-notes (Sanjek, 1990), jotting down things on a piece of paper. I also made conscious use of head-notes (Sanjek, 1990),

which I found very useful because important observations may not seem important at first or when initial notes are written down. I gradually stopped taking scratch notes to see if the pen and paper I brought with me on walks were obstacles for discussion I could remove. Except for a few semi-structured interviews with school officials, I generally stopped bringing the piece of paper because it sometimes felt odd taking notes openly. It made people change their tone and posture somehow, making the situation ‘official’, turning a casual conversation into an interview.

Remembering the theory of roles, masks and impression management by Goffman (1959), my hope was to access back-stage life by being engaged in informal interaction and conversation with informants. With this comes a responsibility to take care not to disclose things informants would want printed. What is off the record can be unclear when taking notes. To protect the identities of the people I met, I have decided to change their names. Since the political status of refugees is a matter of controversy and maybe even a source of danger or difficulty for them, it is important that to take extra care when handling any sensitive information. Mentioning who did something is sometimes not important and can be omitted because the action itself is the important part.

Many of the refugees I met thought that I was there to tell their story of strife and hardship to help their cause and make it more known in the west in order to somehow help them. Although this was not my intention for going there, I would like more people to know about this soon-to-be historical situation. Most importantly, I believe it could help in future and current refugee situations around the world, or help in integration by better understanding the background of the refugees. According to my shared-house neighbor in Damak, an officer with the IOM, The Bhutanese camps are known in the refugee community as very well run, with proper huts, clean water, better conditions and organization than many other places. Certainly, every refugee situation is unique, and this group happens to be fortunate enough to have a host community with the same language among other things, but there could be some lessons that can be applied to other refugee situations as well.

2 Negotiating religion, caste and kin

2.1 Introduction

Being separated physically from both Bhutanese and, to a degree, Nepali society, the Bhutanese refugees must negotiate their identity within the context of the refugee camp. Having been the main hub of the refugee population for over 20 years, it has gradually taken over the role of the foothills of southern Bhutan as their most influential location associated with creation of identity. The close proximity of the huts and the strict system under which they make their lives there are strong factors for maintaining a sense of identity as a community. This community, however, is not quite the same as it originally was in Bhutan. It differs from how it once was in countless ways. Some significant institutions, like religious practice, the concept of caste and the important role of the family have been retained. In Bhutan, huts were mostly built with much more distance between them there and the refugees come from all across the southern belt of Bhutan, which is a large spread of land. Most are linguistically and ethnically Nepalese, except a few from Thimphu and other parts of the country including a very small number of Drukpa and Sharchop people expelled allegedly for involvement in the protests in 1990 for democracy.

The caste system has been abolished officially for over 50 years in Nepal but is still very important in the understanding of society. The caste and sub-caste you belong to is often the second thing asked of a stranger after the name, which also often is synonymous with caste. The label still bears some meaning to people and though regulations regarding caste are much more relaxed and sometimes non-existent, many feel a special kind of pride of their own caste and its specific traditions and symbols. Religion in the camp is about the same as outside the camp, most are Hindu, some more active than others are, many are Buddhist, many are both, and some mainly follow the kirati animist tradition. Not everyone believe the stories of their religion as literal truth, but emphasize the importance of following their family's tradition or the moral implications of belief. One difference from the outside is the big growth of Christianity in the camp compared to elsewhere. Particularly a great number of young people join church groups and Christian communities in or directly outside the camp. This is a growing trend in Nepal in general, but in the camp in particular. This tendency demands some

discussion because it is greater with the refugees who are going away to the west than it is for the local Nepalese people who will stay there.

The main language of the camp is unquestionably Nepali. Other languages are used in several different settings however. English and Dzongkha are taught to kids in school. In fact, the schools in the camp are all what in Nepal is called ‘English-schools’ where all education happens (at least in theory) in English. There are spoken English centers that teach adults English. Most movies people watch are in Hindi, which people understand since it is very similar. Brahmin priests read passages in Sanskrit for ceremonies, though almost no one understands that language. In addition, many of the ethnic groups or castes have their own languages that differ from standard Nepali. Most people know only some words and alternate their use with the standard Nepali words. For example, there are at least eight different caste-specific ways of greeting somebody that people tried to teach me. Later they would test me to see if I remembered their way. The standard Nepali greeting is Namaste or namaskar for groups of people or older, respected persons. The latter being a more formal Sanskrit word. Hands are held together as in a prayer. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Limbu and Rai people use the word “Sewaro”, but mostly to other Rai and Limbu. Gurung, Mongar and Tamang each have their own greetings though many are unaware of them or do not know which is which. Christians used the greeting “Jaiamasi” which means hail to the Messiah. A possible reason for the Christians to have their own greeting is the fact that the Hindu meaning of Namaste is “I bow to/salute the divine within you” which may be what did not fit well with Christian view of divinity.

Maila Daju told me that the Nepali spoken by the Bhutanese refugees slightly differs in accent and words from the local people to such a degree that they could be identified that way, though it was more prominent before. One difference of the Latinized written language was how the Magar people was referred to by the older name Mongar by Bhutanese. My command of the language was not good enough to notice most of these subtleties on my own though.

2.2 Caste

The Nepali caste system has a long history tied to the system in India and the Hindu religion. In the caste system, there are four Varnas encompassing almost the entire population. These are the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. These classifications are based on different professions, but caste also has an important aspect of dividing purity and impurity. In 1962, the kingdom of Nepal formally abolished the caste system. Doing so was an important symbolic and structural change, but in reality, caste identity is not something that can be simply abolished. It is deeply embedded in society, incorporated, and enacted by people every day. Like class identity, it exists as a social fact and even if politicians agree to remove it, old habits die hard. Today, many changes have been made, and in many respects, people have indeed left the caste system behind. In schoolbooks, concepts such as untouchability are listed as “bad customs of our society”. Caste among the Bhutanese refugees is treated differently from in India, which in turn, is a merger of two separate understandings of caste (Juergensmeyer, 2006, s. 54). Being a Buddhist country, Bhutan has not had a caste system other than that practiced by the Lhotshampas, but divided the population in ethnic groups. However, the distinction between ethnic group and caste was blurred in the context of Bhutanese society. Some ethnic groups, such as the Rai and the Tamang people, were often talked of as castes.

The system may be officially abolished, but it is far from forgotten. Seemingly, everyone I met could tell me his or her caste. Often, this was a natural part of introducing themselves. If they did not say, someone else could mention it during the conversation or after the encounter. It was something I should know about them. Initially, I was cautious asking about caste because I thought it would be more of a taboo than it turned out to be. Most people had no problem talking about castes though they sometimes would refer me to someone older who would know more about the subject. A person's caste could be determined by looking at their last name, as it often corresponded to a caste or sub-group of a caste. Some claimed it could be observed simply by looking at his or her face, which is not surprising given the ethnic diversity of the Lhotshampas. However, this does not take into account the many mixed marriages across caste lines, but when I asked how one of our milk customers could recognize somebody's caste, he said: “we have the same face, and they [pointing] have a different face”. Coming to Nepal, I was surprised to be confronted with inquiries as to my own caste, mostly by children who were equally surprised and disbelieving at my lack of caste or rather,

knowledge thereof. In their view, I had to have a caste, but I just did not know which. The general openness on the matter included the ranking of the castes from high to low, but this was more a theoretical topic for scholars and experts. The reason for this could be that it is a matter of historical fact, but for some it was a source of pride or of resignation. It is possible that the people of high caste were more comfortable with this topic, but the fact remains that caste identity throughout the refugee camp was a visible aspect of life that carried meaning. It did, however not have a large effect on daily life for most people, the exceptions mainly being Brahmin priests and Dalit, the high and low ends of the caste spectrum. Although rules pertaining to the caste system were followed privately, the camp as a society was not organized around caste lines. For example, there was no segregation in schools or housing sectors. The community was just as multi-ethnic as the rest of Nepal, if not even more mixed because of the close proximity of huts and thereby families of different castes and ethnicities.

Caste and ethnic identity were categories connected to each other. The main binary was between what was called the Mongolian castes, and the Aryan castes. What is interesting about this is that it is at the same time an ethnic or tribal dimension, while still packaged in the social hierarchical model of the caste system. The worldview of the Bhutanese refugees is entwined in the caste system and treated as the natural order or at least part of the prevailing tradition. The view that different peoples have different qualities and strengths is imbued in daily conversation and not propagated directly, nor is the view widely contested in everyday life. The neighbors, who were blacksmiths by caste, never entered our hut, but waited outside to buy milk. When I enquired about this, Vivek told me that it was not because they were prejudiced about the watertight castes, but something they had to adhere to if they wanted to keep their other customers. If they had a reputation for letting them come into their home, maybe others would stop buying milk from them. In his view, it was not up to them to decide what to do. The same reasoning was what made it impossible for Bishal, my friend who was Brahmin by caste, to visit the huts of Dalit people. This was despite his claim that caste and untouchability meant nothing to him personally. The social pressure to observe traditional regulations pertaining to caste was the reason, not personal conviction of the validity of those regulations.

2.3 Miteri ceremony – Fictive kin

The most important and fundamental aspect of belonging and identity for the refugees was probably the family unit. Solidarity within families was the pillar upon which the community as a whole rested.

For illustrating the meanings of family in the camp, there is an old institution in Nepalese society I find worth mentioning called ‘Miteri’. At a ceremony coinciding with the second birthday of Krishna and Roshni’s daughter, she was introduced to one of her friends for life called ‘mitini’ and vice versa. The male equivalent title is ‘mit’. The Miteri are chosen by an elder, in this case the grandmother on the father’s side. It is possible to have several Miteri, but for the most part, it is limited to a handful due to the great responsibility it entails for both parties. Ideally, Miteri kin will remain in close contact and help each other like family throughout their lives.

Described by Messerschmidt (1982), the Miteri tradition is as a kind of ceremonial or fictive kinship, where ties can transcend vertical caste boundaries between otherwise endogamous groups. The purpose of this institution is to create strong bonds of friendship and solidarity between families, which is an objective that is given a new level of importance in the context of the resettlement process. The potential distance between families having been resettled is threatening the ties that hold the entire community together. Many efforts are made by the resettled refugee communities to keep connections through sport and cultural events as well as visits. The wishes of the refugees to keep together however, is incompatible with the needs of the host countries and their plans for integration. A number of interesting papers could be written on already resettled families, and many have already begun writing about the challenges encountered by the Bhutanese refugees in the US (Centre of South Asian Studies, SOAS, University of London, 2013). What I know through continued contact with the family I lived with, and who now live in the US, is that special importance is placed on reuniting with Miteri-kin. Specifically, this was through the posting of pictures on social media, commenting on how it was nice to reunite with miteri-kin.

The ceremony itself started with friends, family and neighbors all converging on Krishna and Roshni’s hut to help make food. Everywhere in and around the house was turned into a temporary kitchen. Roshni was making a mountain of sel roti, a kind of pastry similar in appearance to donuts. Boys and girls sat inside grinding garlic, cumin seeds and other spices,

the neighbors were busy in their kitchens making additional food, decorations and balloons were put up, outside sat a group of young girls from our neighborhood chatting. They were washing and cutting several bucket loads of tomatoes, potatoes, green chilies, red chilies, and ginger. Many of them had small cuts in their hands because, true to traditional technique, they were not using any chopping board. This did not stop them, however. Moods seemed to be high all around. The little birthday girl was running around enjoying all the attention. Her parents had me taking pictures during the ceremonies to follow. After eating, it was time for giving the gifts. Ganesh had helped me find a toy to present her in the nearby Bangay bazar, but I did not know the correct time to give it to her, so I messed up and gave it to her straight away when they told me it was time. “No, no, no, not yet!” was the immediate reaction. I had to awkwardly take it back and wait for the others to assemble in the bedroom. There, the little girl, sitting on her mother’s lap with a paper crown on her head, was approached by a queue of guests who gave her a gift, smeared a bit of red tika on her forehead and congratulated her before receiving tea and a piece of the big birthday cake they had ordered from a bakery in Damak. Madan sat beside her with a similar crown of his own, helping with the unpacking. The room was packed and incredibly hot. Everybody was sweating but it did not matter. A while after the birthday gifts were given, it was time for the two little girls to be formally introduced as each other’s mitinis. The other girl was about the same age and lived close by. They were placed on opposite sides of a carpet, facing each other, but separated by a veil held by a woman. The birthday girl curiously peeked under. Between them were many offerings and the grandmother sat on the side of the carpet talking to them both. The veil was removed and symbolic gifts were exchanged between the children for them to keep as mementos of the mitini bond created that day. The exchange was similar to a part of wedding ceremonies where small keepsakes were exchanged between bride and groom. The two children then gave each other, with some help, more red tika on the foreheads, sealing the pact of lifelong friendship.

Later when I talked to her, she said that she was very old and therefore it was very important for her to do such things while she still could. Family was a matter to be taken very seriously in the times of resettlement, divergence and uprootedness. This importance included fictive kin. In the same way as friends and family seldom used given names but rather familial terms like ‘little brother’ or ‘big sister’ etc., miteri would often use the terms ‘mit’ or ‘mitini’ when addressing each other to show respect. The ceremony brought the whole family together, not just for the meal but also for the preparations for it. Maintaining close family ties was

regarded as an important prerequisite for getting through the resettlement process. While siblings will mostly end up in the same place, friends and miteri will risk separation and therefore it is very important to create strong bonds while in the camp. It would be fair to say that the importance placed on this partly rises from the wish to keep the entire population of the Bhutanese refugees united in spirit even if separated geographically. The miteri tradition helps in this because it goes beyond the strict boundaries of the family and sometimes also caste or ethnic group, especially in the modern time with many mixed caste marriages.

2.4 Ethnic binary

Problems and conflicts related to caste and/or ethnic groups within the refugee community was seldom part of discussions. One could argue that like other groups' identity-shaping processes, emphasis was rather put on differences to external categories, thus delineating boundaries (Barth, 1998, s. 15). This would in turn strengthen the sense of being a united group of refugees. This seemed to be the major tendency in Beldangi. However, one event in particular made me aware of some hidden tensions with regard to ethnic groups in the camp. I was invited to a neighbor's house after returning from the pigsty one day. He had two friends over and we were offered some of his home-made Tibetan millet ale called 'Tongba' which is an alcoholic beverage with fermented millet, is drunk with a metal straw and can be supplemented by adding hot water. The two guests eagerly told me about their life in the camp. After a while, the discussion wandered to the subject of caste. The two men belonged to the Chettri and Tamang groups. The Chettri was doing most of the talking, saying that he and I were the same in that we were both Aryans, while our Tamang friend was Mongol. To make his point, he said that we had similar facial features like our eyes, nose and facial hair, which was different from the other man's face. At this point the Tamang man interrupted and said that we were all the same, listing all the castes he could think of and saying we were all the same. I said that I agreed with him, as did the Chettri, but he nonetheless continued his lecture on how he and I were more alike, while emphasizing that this did not mean we were somehow better or worse than anyone else. The Tamang man did not seem to like the way the discussion was heading, but did not try to argue any further. The two seemed to be very old friends. The tongba or the presence of a foreigner may have provided an excuse for them both to express things they would normally not share. However, the classification of ethnic groups

as castes should also be taken into consideration. Tamang refugees as well as others frequently referred to Tamang as a caste, but elsewhere, people mostly talk of Tamang as a people or ethnic group. Most are Buddhist, and as such not practicing the Hindu caste system. However, living in Nepal, where caste is part of people's identity, many conform by calling it their caste.

Nowadays, the different castes can be found in most position of society, but they largely follow traditional sociocultural patterns if you look at the big picture. According to several people with whom I talked to on the matter, almost all political leaders, most university students and highly educated people are Brahmin and Chetri. The army and police consist, in large part, of Kirati people like Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Tamang and Magar. Chetri people are also often found there but are perceived to be more likely to have higher ranks. Middle-Brother said during a discussion that "now even some Brahmin join the army, but as officers". The reason for this was that "they are more educated and good leaders but not as strong". The Newari people, from whom Nepal got its name, were on many occasions presented to me as being shrewd merchants living in the cities for the most part. The lowest on the caste scale are the Dalit, the untouchables. They are traditionally known to, and often still have jobs that are considered as unclean. The family next door, where an old couple lived with some of their adult children and grandchildren was one example. The old man was a smith who made khukuris, other knives, tools and made repairs. This came to me as another surprise as I had thought that blacksmithing would be a traditional occupation seen as honorable. Goldsmiths, leatherworkers, butchers, garbage collectors, and street sweepers were also in the same general category.

Vivek often referred to the Dalits as the downtrodden people, or watertight castes. The latter has to do with the idea that someone who marries one of the Dalit will become Dalit themselves along with their children and there is no going back. With other castes, the family are considered as the caste of the husband. He himself had married a woman who was born Brahmin by birth. She was a little older than he was and something I was only told late in my stay was that she had previously been married and had all the children except the youngest with a Limbu man but had divorced him. This man had already resettled. She was now Rai, but still maintained frequent contact with her family. She was also doing a long-term religious ritual called Santoshi Maa vrata devoted to the Goddess of Satisfaction, Santoshi Mata. Among other things, she wore a different color tika on her forehead and she fasted one day

every week. The fasting was not how I had imagined it. It did not involve abstaining from eating during the day, but only once each day and it restricted eating to specific things. No rice, no sour food and no regular salt could be eaten. Any conflict and quarrels. She had a much larger shrine in the hut than most of the others I visited. This may have more to do with her personal relation to her religion than caste, as she told me that she always prayed in the morning when she got up. The children fell between the two closely linked castes of Limbu and Rai, saying that both were right.

In death, caste is still a valid concern. In funerals, the dead body has to be lifted, moved, carried, clothed and unclothed in specific ways according to Hindu traditions. People associated with the temple do some of this, but one of the family members must also do some. Brahmin people, among other Hindus, would usually display the body outside the house laid out on a large tree leaf. I went to such a funeral once. It was an elderly woman living close by. She had died and everyone from the community came by her family's hut. There, a member of the family sat, watching over the deceased, waving a fan to keep flies away and receive the people coming to look and pay their respect. When others finished chopping firewood and making a wooden gurney to carry the body, she was ceremonially transported to a place of cremation on the river. There, a fire was built and the dead placed in the bonfire, undressed and set alight. Then all attending guests were given a small piece of wood to throw on the fire before leaving. All this was in order to make sure it is a "good fire" where nothing like pieces of clothing is left.

One day, kansha daju told me something about the meaning of caste in funerals when we were walking outside the camp on the paths through the jungle leading to the road and the farms.

"When mother dies, according to the rules, I will be the only one of the sons who will be allowed to touch her body".

"Why is that?" I asked.

"Because – our Maila daju is in inter-caste marriage with (his wife) who is Brahmin. Jethi daju and our sister are both married to chetris. I am the only son who has a Rai wife; therefore, I am the only one who can touch her when she has died. This is the tradition."

I thought at the time that this was something he would rather not talk about with his brothers directly present, not to disrespect them or their wives. Inter-caste marriages seemed to be generally accepted, so when he told me this it sounded like I had gotten deeper and discovered a potential exception to this overall tolerance. I later tried to investigate the issue by asking his older brother about this peculiarity, but unfortunately, he gracefully dodged the question, so I cannot exactly verify how the necessary touching would be handled. In most other situations, the fact that there were inter-caste marriages did not seem to be an issue. In this matter however, dealing with the profound and serious aspect that is death, it might play a more important role. My less than great comprehension of the content of discussions, customs of behavior and body language, probably deprived me of some insights in this matter.

2.5 Dinner with a Watertight Jumping Doctor

Regarding the caste system, one event that I should mention is the time I was invited for dinner with a Dalit traditional religious specialist known as a Dhami, or jumping doctor. I had been in Beldangi 1, which is separated from Beldangi 2 by a few hundred meter wide plain with bushes and big trees, to interview some school personnel there. As my friend, Bishal, and I were walking back on the path, a man I had seen before came the other way on a parallel path. He called out to me in Nepali. He had a big black beard and long hair coiled up on his head. I thought that he might be a Brahmin priest. My friend told me that he invited me to his house for dinner. I had met him before when Sudip and I went for a walk. He had been sitting outside his hut on a bench, playing the guitar. I had stopped and listened for a while and even tried a few tunes myself. After our late night jam, I had not seen him much, but now I had the opportunity so I told him I would come, though not today, because Bachala Maya I would be expecting me back home soon and she would be disappointed should not show up. When he had walked on, my friend, who was Brahmin, told me that this man was actually Dalit, stressing that though he himself did not personally care about caste rules, it would be impossible for him to accompany me to his house. This was only because of his concern for his reputation. When I brought the matter up for Vivek, he responded a similar way, saying that he could go with me to his house, but he would not eat his food, though I might do that. It was not, he added, that their family cared about the caste issue, but they feared that others would exclude them or go other places to buy their milk if they were known to eat there.

When the day came for me to visit, I was accompanied by Vivek and his sons. He expressed his concern that I would not find the place if I went on my own and it was getting dark. He told me that the man was also a Dharmi, which means traditional healers also called jumping doctors. They are often called upon to help if someone is sick or having other problems. When we got there, we were invited in and I got a cup of tea. The dinner was not ready yet, he told us. Actually, I suspect he had not felt certain that I would come to visit at all, and had therefore waited. As his wife was making the dal bhat, we sat in his living room/bedroom and talked. He had posters of Hindu gods, among them the monkey-deity, Hanuman, on his wall. I asked who it was. As this was in the middle of a Hindu festival called Purana, or tales of bygone days, the stories of the gods had been read on loud speakers for several days. Vivek then took it upon himself to tell me his English rendition of how Hanuman, strong as he was, brought an entire mountain to the wounded Lakshmana because he could not find a specific medicinal herb that grew on it. The host mostly listened and nodded when he was asked in Nepali for confirmation on the details of the story. After a while, Vivek and the sons went home. The man told me it would be about a half hour before the food was ready and that I could go with them and come back later if I thought it would be boring to sit there. They did not speak good English after all. I told him that I would rather stay and try to speak Nepali with him, which he seemed to be very happy to hear. After sitting for a while, talking to him and his son, he went out a short while. When he came back, he asked me to come with him and we would do a puja. A puja was, as I understood it, any religious ritual, worship or sacrifice. We went out and around the corner into an extension of the house where he had a shrine dedicated to one of the major Hindu deities. The shrine covered one wall like a bookcase with lots of different figures and objects in the shelves. He sat down on a mat facing the shrine, motioned for me to sit down beside him, and gave me a pair of bells to ring. He started to chant and rattle another rhythmical instrument. I followed his lead, trying to keep pace with my bells. We sat like that for a few minutes. Just as I thought I started to get the hang of it, he stopped. Now that was over and we could go to eat. It was a nice vegetarian curry quite similar to what others would eat. As we ate, the son asked about my dietary restrictions. Did I eat pig's meat? Did I eat donkey meat? Both were surprising and interesting to him. When I told him that I sometimes also ate cow in my country, he just calmly explained that to them, cows are like gods, and not to be eaten. I had mentioned this difference a few times before and gotten similar responses in other households, apart from the comment by some Buddhists I met who said they would also eat beef if it was legal in Nepal.

Although this was just one of many Dalit households, it seemed that religious rules and observance was taken more serious there than most other places. At the time, I thought it a little strange that someone from the so-called watertight castes of people so strongly and wholeheartedly would embrace the religious tradition through which the system of castes was maintained, ranking them in a low and repressed category. An explanation for this could be the previously mentioned important role of fatalism in Nepalese culture and society. (Bista, 1991) The idea that one's fate is predetermined is very much a part of life for most people. This man was particularly religious, being a jumping doctor as well. Not all dalit people in the camp were this religiously active, so the example should not be taken to represent the dalits in the camp as a group.

2.6 Religion

I was sitting outside my house in Damak when a group of schoolchildren from a nearby school walked by. They stopped and approached me. After asking some other questions, one girl of about nine asked me:

“You are Christian?”

“No, I'm not, but we celebrate Christmas at home with food and gifts”

“Under the tree?” she asked

“That's right! We put the gifts under the tree”

“Your Christian God lives under the tree and you give gifts to him!” she said with a look of both amazement and curiosity.

Kids often came to me and started asking me many things I could not have expected or prepared for. The most common would be my name and where I was from, but then they would almost invariably ask about my religion and caste. The idea of me having neither caste nor religion was for many, especially children, hard to grasp. Though most people in the camp were Hindu or Buddhist, a growing number were converting to Christianity. Different temples and churches could be found in and around the camp. Hindu and Buddhist weddings had

some similarities and differences, but caste or ethnic group also played a difference in how ceremonies were conducted. Certain parts of a Buddhist wedding I attended could only be done because both parties of the union were Tamang by caste. The old Hindu woman who died was brought to the river and ritually cremated on a large fire with all the attending people throwing a token piece of wood on the fire before leaving. She was Brahmin. Some Hindus were not burned, however. Mon Maya's husband had been buried according to Kirat tradition. Vivek showed me the gravestone in the woods outside the camp. There were several similar graves with big painted stones on top. Ram Chandra's gravestone was blue, made to look like a house with doors, windows and steps. Engraved on the stone was his date of birth and death. Interestingly, it also featured the date he came to the camps and his hut number. Vivek regularly visited the grave to wash the stone and leave flowers on it. After resettlement, going there to visit would become impossible.

One time I spoke to Bishal, who had worked with scholars many times before. We had met and talked many times before until one day he asked me about my religious view. When I told him I had no religion, he nodded and said that it was probably because I had higher education. The response surprised me. Whether his view was that educated people automatically would not be religious because they would know scientific explanations for things attributed to religious phenomena, or that he just had that experience with academic people from earlier encounters, was hard to say. I did not meet anyone who said they were non-religious or atheist, at least not officially. An important factor, though not the only one, was belonging to a group and a tradition. Converting to Christianity was common among youth especially, and was talked about by older people as a kind of teenage rebellion against tradition and family. Though this explanation seems plausible, I would also take into consideration the imminent aspect of western resettlement. With that in mind, the sudden popularity of Christianity in the camp can be attributed to a form of pre-emptive self-assimilation. The underlying assumption being that they would have an easier time fitting in or being accepted if they were Christian.

One thing I noticed was that there were almost never any western or white people inside the camp. I had expected that, given the UN and NGO involvement there, but in fact, most of the workers, volunteers and incentivized volunteers were refugees themselves, locals or UN workers from India and other nearby countries. American and European personnel were present, but they worked mostly in the office complex in the town, not in the actual camp. One American woman I met in the camp was doing research like me, but in a different setting

including volunteer work, the other American, a man in his forties, turned out to be a missionary having worked in a church group for Bhutanese refugees in his hometown in the US. He told me he came every year to visit his friends and see how they were doing. He avoided talking about the Christian mission, except telling me the name of the NGO he worked with. According to the business card he gave me, it was a church group. I later came to realize that many people with whom I had not talked thought that I was in fact working for one of the churches and had been spreading that rumor. I came to learn this in the late stages of my field work, when a middle-aged man with glasses who worked in a small stall by the central road in the camp, repairing watches and the like, waved at me to signal that I should come over. He told me that he had seen me many times walking past his shop and that he had heard I was there to spread Christianity. I was surprised and told him I was not. He seemed a happy with that answer, invited me to sit, drink tea and chat. He was Brahmin, had higher education and spoke good English. We sat there, discussing religions and caste until the sun went down. Then my middle brother appeared. He had been looking for me. This reminded me that I was expected home where my family felt a great responsibility for me.

3 Work as a moral imperative

Time, economy and morality

3.1 Introduction

Refugees are as groups spatially separated from, and temporally in between the categories and groups that we usually think of in terms of nationality, ethnicity and belonging. The world system, as represented by nation-states, international borders and organizations, national sports teams and citizenship laws, is governed by the common idea of the nation. National belonging has become a natural part of existence. With so much importance placed on the nation, it makes being without any an unnatural state to be in for humans. The view that refugees are between nationalities like others may be between jobs makes it is easy to envision refugee life as passive groups of people living a life centered on outside help and dealing with harsh conditions without considering the active involvement of the refugees in their own lives. A closer view of the situation on the ground reveals a far more complex web of connections and interests making conceptions of refugees seem blunt and arbitrary.

Refugees are not just patrons of the world community, spending their time sitting in the camp doing nothing, though this seemed to be the opinion of some locals. In Beldangi, the realities and implications of being refugees clearly influenced the circumstances of people in everyday life. Food rations, strict order of housing arrangements, NGO projects and programs, the overarching prospect of resettlement were some of these factors. However, there were a plethora of economic streams and currents within the camp, formal and informal. People took odd jobs in and outside the camp, participated in incentivized volunteer work run by the UN and other organizations, there were small shops, family businesses based in the home like small-scale artisanship and handiwork. The informal possibilities for income included both socially acceptable “legitimate” and “illegitimate” types (Hart, 1973, s. 69), with the illegitimate ones, such as theft, being associated to idleness, weak family bonds, straying too far from traditions and psychological problems. I will argue that the need to keep a busy schedule and have an income stems, not only from individual ambitions, but a moral imperative to keep busy and thus escape the threat of idleness. The ideal was to lead what people regarded as normal life in spite of the circumstances. Contradicting the lifestyle systemically perpetuated by the relief-diplomacy complex, many seek ways to make their

lives their own and to avoid the stigma of being idle. On the other side of things, some people had lived for extended periods in other parts of the country, taking jobs as teachers or other positions where their education was in demand. This could in some cases cause other refugees who were ‘stuck’ in camp to question whether they were all as legit and deserving as the others were, who had struggled in the camps all along. Not being there to get the full refugee experience and not contributing and remaining idle were important extremes that delineate work as a crucial factor in refugee identity maintenance. The line between what citizens do and what refugees do can at times be hard to see.

3.2 Selling milk

Life in the camp burst to life around 5 o’clock when everybody got up and started doing chores or other work. Normally, tea was the only thing we consumed until around 9 o’clock. In our hut, Vivek would usually get up 30-40 minutes earlier and went to the farms just outside the camp on his bicycle. There he bought cans of fresh cow or buffalo milk from the farmers and brought it back to the hut. Bicycles in the camp were old classic-style bikes made in India. They were widely used, both for getting around, and for transporting things like one would do with a carriage. For this reason, there was also a good market for bike repair shops around the camp. Sometimes, the nearest farm was out of milk or had too little, so he had to continue to the next farm. When he got back from the farms, Bachala Maya had to boil the milk in a big kettle, usually using the gas stove. This meant that they had to buy gas canisters from the markets outside. The coal stove otherwise used for cooking with rationed coal took too long to use and were mostly used for making breakfast and supper two or three times a day.

Many people in the camp made tea in the morning and it was made by boiling milk and adding dry tea and sugar if desired. This meant that vendors would have to start selling milk very early to stay competitive. Though some customers were loyal to some degree, not having milk usually meant losing customers that day. As demand was high, they always sold out, but it was still important to maintain their reputation that they were usually in supply. That reputation was what kept customers returning, they explained. Some of the milk was set aside for making curd. Machala Maya did this by putting a small amount of yesterday’s curd in a

bottle filled with milk and letting it sit until it was ready. It was very popular for use in everyday cooking. All day long, people of all ages came to the hut to buy small quantities of milk. Young boys and girls came to the door yelling: “Auntie/Didi! Dudh chha?” meaning “Auntie/sister! Is there milk?” Alternatively just “Didi! Dudh dine!” meaning “Big sister! Give milk!” There was talk of other milk vendors and farmers watering down the milk for increased profit, but there were few complaints about that in our hut. Sometimes we made ghee, which is a kind of butter, if there was left over curd or if Bachala Maya had set some aside. Having butter on your bhat, (cooked rice) was seen as a small luxury, but it involved a bit of physical work. We used a wooden churn and manually rotating it forwards and backwards until clumps of butter formed and Bachala Maya, the expert, said it was enough. When doing this it was important to keep churning constantly, so we used to take turns to keep the speed up. It is also important not to churn too long because then it may be ruined. The butter was sometimes sold, but often it was given to family and friends either free or reserved for them to buy.

While grown-ups were up early, the kids were given a little leeway to sleep. Madan, the youngest, got up later in the morning. However, starting at 5am, either Asmita or Jiwan were expected to help their mother fetching water. This usually meant that she would start calling for them to get up and help at five, with increasingly intense insistence in her voice. Jiwan, the oldest brother who had finished school, also had to help with the other things like buying milk and making food for the pigs. Asmita had school, so she had to get ready for that. It was actually very important to have spotless uniforms and put the hair the right way for school. The girls spent a long time helping each other with the hair. She also had to help her mother cook or go to market if they needed something. This was before breakfast, of course, and after fetching water. It was impressive to see small girls and boys carrying the heavy cans of water, leaning far to one side to keep their balance. I worried about their backs, but I repeatedly heard people say that the strength of the Nepalese women should never be underestimated, as they were strengthened by carrying heavy burdens from an early age. This point reinforces the more general identity marker of the Nepali-Bhutanese as strong and hardworking people. This image was an important motivating part of refugee activity. Partly from this image, a stigma against inactivity was socially maintained, which was very important to avoid.

Several plastic cans and jars had to be filled two times a day. They also had a huge stone bowl in the bathing- and clothes washing area behind the hut and the toilet. In addition to this, they

kept a reserve of water cans in the kitchen just in case they ran out. There was always a queue at the water pump, so to be efficient it was important to get there right away and not have to wait for too long. People also placed their cans in rows by the pump beforehand. Some of the cans were named, but many depended on recognizing their own. This sometimes led to some disagreements over who were first in line. One time there were two women arguing loudly over whose can was which. I was impressed that this did not happen more often because the cans looked very similar. Having to carry the same cans repeatedly every day, gives you a different perspective. The importance of having enough water was something I learned when temperatures rose to around 40° Celsius. Water was also used to sprinkle the ground in the yard outside the huts and the roads to keep the sand from drying and blowing around, through the walls and everywhere. I was also told that it made the air cooler around the house.

Drinking water was also important, though Vivek insisted that I should not drink so much cold water, as I could get a cold. Drinking hot water is very common all over Nepal. Another thing was the danger from showering when one was sweaty. He advised me to do as him, wait until the sunset, and only shower once in a day lest I get boils on my skin. Sometimes, people washed their feet, brushed their teeth or washed their hair when they were at the pump and the queue was not too long or consisting of children (if the aforementioned was older). The meaning of seniority was very evident. There was an informal water-pump hierarchy. Within this the older kids or grown-ups could jump the queue and make the younger kids wait. That is not to say that it happened all the time. When I saw this happen, the younger kids did not seem to mind or get angry, just bored. One time, Ran Bahadur even made the entire pump his personal bathtub, sitting down and washing with soap. The kids who had to wait and everyone else present laughed with him. It may have been partly a spontaneous jest to lighten the mood, not many others would have done it with others waiting to use the pump.

3.3 Refugee life hacks

When the water was in the hut and Bachala Maya was making ready the milk, Vivek would keep the books by noting the amount of milk bought and the price paid. In the evening, he recorded the daily sales and profits. This was one of his jobs, while his wife usually handled the actual money and sales. After that, he would make ready the coal stove, cracking the bits of coal into smaller pieces so that they would burn better. Every family in the camp by an

organization many years ago. It worked well, but like many other things in the camp, it needed some creative improvisation sometimes to work properly. When he had split enough of the coal, he filled it into the cylindrical stove, putting some small pieces of firewood and plastic on top to kindle the fire. I once asked why everyone burned plastic, since the smoke from it and the coal filled the air in the whole camp making it hard to breathe. He agreed that the use of plastic was not ideal, but it was much easier and faster than other means of kindling and everybody did the same thing. Most of the smoke that filled the camp at the times of the daily meals was due to poor quality coal anyway, not so much the plastic. There was a lot of extra work to make the stoves work properly. Originally, they had come with metal bars to put cooking utensils on, but they soon rusted away, so everyone put stones on top of the coal to use as a platform for their utensils. The walls inside the cylinder was prone to break and take damage after prolonged use, so it had to be repaired with mud from time to time. The bits of coal were, as mentioned, either too big or pulverized on transport. A common sight was people sitting with a heap of coal powder, a bucket of water and an empty coal bag where they put finished pieces of coal to dry. Maila daju lectured me on the different designs. The most efficient shape that dried fastest was longer than the standard round ones. A secret ingredient was a little bit of the WFP's³ high energy super cereal, which is primarily meant to be used to combat famine and malnutrition. Though it was sometimes eaten by the refugees, it did not fit in to the normal Nepali diet consisting mainly of the staple food of dal bhat (rice with lentils) with various vegetable or meat curries. In this way, they had found another way to utilize its energy.

Solar stoves had been donated at one time to change the way the refugees cooked food, and they were found standing among the rows of huts everywhere. A shop in the central camp repaired and assembled new ones. They were seldom used however. Sometimes people used them to heat one pan while another pan used the stove, but most people seemed to regard the solar cookers as too inefficient for daily use. Most houses also had traditional clay and mud fireplaces that could be used with firewood, but they too were seldom used since the ration was for coal and not firewood. In Moma's kitchen, however, there was a special fireplace called the hearth. The hearth was symbolic of the family unity. Ganesh also explained that it was also to be used as the center of some ceremonies like a shrine. Both Ganesh and Vivek pointed this out. It was a pit in the ground with three pillars to cook on. This one was actually used quite a bit. Phul Maya, Ganesh's wife, fried tubes of dry corn paste that expanded in the

³ The World Food Program

oil into large crunchy snacks they sold from their small chatpate stall along with the spicy chatpate snack served in paper torn out of used books. That small business also seemed to go well. Moma and Sabina, the cousin next door, also sat in the little kiosk selling the spicy snack food for hungry passersby.

3.4 Responsibility for selling milk

The family I lived with spent much of their time on the milk and dairy product trade. They bought it two times a day from farmers on the outside, and sold it to other refugees. This earned them a modest profit. One day, the entire household had to be away during the day because they had to go to the IOM office and do what was called a re-medical. This is part of the preparation for resettlement where a range of standardized health tests are undertaken to ensure the good health of refugees before they can go. This has to be done several times with months in between, hence the term re-medical. This would take hours, so Vivek told me that I had to watch the house while they were gone. This was a responsibility usually entrusted to family. He could easily have asked someone else in the extended family to do it, but chose to ask me instead. It was critical that we never left the hut unattended, because thieves could easily steal from empty huts. Furthermore, he asked if I could handle selling out the rest of the milk. I had never done that before, and was unsure about the exact pricing and Nepali measurements. He then said that I did not have to sell the milk. They could make curd or put it to use some other way. I decided that I should rise to the challenge anyway and help my family who had helped me so much and entrusted me with protecting their hut. After they left, people continued to come and ask for Didi. I told them that she was at the IOM office and that I could sell them milk. Some looked deeply confused by this. A few left as soon as they heard everybody was out, but most just took the milk and gave me the money. The milk was measured in pawa, which we counted as approximately a quarter of a liter. Having just learnt the prices and measurements, and the fast-paced language also made it difficult. One time I made a mistake by selling less milk to a woman than she had asked for. She tried to give back the change I had given her and explain this to me, but I misunderstood and thought she meant the price was wrong. As the misunderstanding persisted, Moma came along, asked me about how much I had charged her, and then settled the case by getting her the extra milk she wanted. She then explained this to me. She came by a few more times to check up on me

before the others returned. I had some difficulties, but with the help of Moma, this was possibly the time I felt most integrated in my field. I filled the role of the milk vendor and in that also a member of the family of milk vendors.

Selling milk was not the entirety of the business though. In addition to milk, curd and butter, the family sold rice alcohol they had bought from outsiders from the mountains. The spirit was pale white but transparent. It was more than often the same regulars that came by the house to drink a glass of “water”, as one woman insisted on calling it. Some seemed to be long running alcoholics who drank a full glass of rice brandy in under a minute and was out the door before you knew it. They could come early in the morning and several times a day. There was no lack of market. The selling of alcohol contrasted somehow with the talk of the bad habits of the people who drank alcohol elsewhere. The profit from selling brandy was much higher than milk.

3.5 Rearing pigs

Early morning was also the time to chop slices of banana tree trunk, mash it in a large mortar and pestle, and mix it in with leftover food for the pigs. The banana tree trunk was green and full of water in tiny chambers. It could easily be cut with a sharp knife, which was often a job for Jiwan in the early morning. There were many of those trees around the camp. The bananas were only part of the reason. Another was to create natural barriers of water-filled trunks in case of fire, and as mentioned, pig fodder. Vivek had three pigs in an enclosure by one of the farms outside the camp. Shristi, their oldest daughter, also had some pigs there with her husband, and Ganesh had pigs on the other side of the farm, where many refugees had put up row upon row of bamboo cages for pigs. They paid rent to the farmer’s wife and had to supply materials and build their own cages. The pigs were reared and sold to Indian merchants who needed large quantities of pork and therefore could pay more than the local prices. Though rearing the pigs took much time and effort, the profit was good and gave a degree of economic flexibility for many families in the camp. Vivek told me that depending on the weight on the pigs, they could make towards 20000 rupees for each. This was the major income for the household, the milk and other things being secondary, but he also said that the pigs were their pastime. The importance of work and daily activity and routine

seemed just as important as the potential profit. It goes beyond subsistence, which is made clearer when taking into consideration the fact that the refugees receive rations. The moral importance of having a daily routine of work, and thus having an income, is revealed by the removal of physiological need for paid work.

3.6 Ration and its impact on lifestyle

An important factor in the refugee experience is the free distribution of a specific quota of various foodstuffs, coal, soap and other necessities colloquially referred to as “ration” by the refugees. Most of these wares are collected by the families every other week at the depot centrally located in the camp. Each household must go to the depot at the day they are listed on a sign in the center of camp. Here, incentivized volunteer refugees at different posts measure up the right amount of rice, lentils, salt, oil and “super cereal”. They must show their ration card and refugee identity card for confirmation, then the supplies are loaded onto bicycles and brought home. These supplies are distributed by the World Food Programme, who have large warehouses in the camp. This has caused some problems with locals feeling unfairly treated and trying to break into the warehouses in the past. According to Vivek, this was the reason the APF had set up their police station in the camp in the first place. Some items, such as soap, was given in batches to the different sub-sector heads and distributed locally. Just as the Nepali locals outside the camps saw this, outsiders might look at this camp and think the refugees lived easy and carefree lives there. Material necessities were given freely by the UN and the associated help organizations. Building materials were supplied by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), educational materials such as textbooks were supplied by Caritas international, health care was provided in the camp by the Association of Medical Doctors in Asia (AMDA). There was also an office of the Transcultural Psychosocial Organization – Nepal (TMO) promoting Psychosocial Resilience among the refugees. That particular NGO was the basis for another study (Chase, 2012). What outsiders may forget is the absence of freedom this lifestyle entails. What does it feel like to be forced into a situation where you do not need to have a job in order to buy food? Apart from repairing the hut when needed, preparing food and going to school for the kids, not much was technically necessary to do. However the refugees felt about it, the rations opened the possibility for inactivity. There were, however, many reasons for people to get an extra income. Some reasons are

purely to benefit quality of living. Buying vegetables, as this was not part of the ration, buying other consumer goods and electricity, paying for further education for youth over 16 years of age. These are all important reasons, but one primary motivator for getting an extra income is boredom and the commonly cited attitude that idleness could cause depression, mental illness and crime. A neighbor who often came to visit and talk to me about the situation of the refugees quoted the known idiom: “Idle hands is the devils workshop”. He told me that many refugees became mentally depressed and some even tried to commit suicide. Having too much time to reflect on their situation as refugees with nowhere to call home is one thing. With the resettlement process ongoing, there is the added factor of not knowing when and where in the world you will go and whether you will see your family again anytime soon. Some families are split up with some being resettled before the rest and some being resettled in vastly different areas. I talked to a few young unmarried men whose families had been resettled already. This meant that they lived in their huts alone with no obligation to do anything except the medical checkups etc. that IOM needed before resettlement. The process of resettlement can take several years. Obviously, people had hobbies and friends to keep them busy, but the main theme of their existence was like an “invisible prison” to quote one Sanichare youth who wanted to be resettled so he could reunite with his family and continue to study. This purgatory-like situation with all its uncertainty is very much overshadowed by the political question of citizenship for Bhutanese refugees while disregarding personal, individual and human factors. The status of being a refugee gives certain rights but severely limits freedom of movement and action. If you want to get ration, you must stay in the camp so you can go and get it at the depot. If you want to live free of rent, you must stay in the hut. If your parents have moved to America, getting married would be difficult, as weddings are usually organized by the families of the couple. For these and many more reasons, many forms of enterprise in different scale and shape are pursued in the camp and outside by refugees.

Most people did something that somehow gave them an income, if only a little bit. Small kiosks called “dokan” had been built in to huts or as separate stalls. Many vegetable sellers and butchers had shops along the main roads in the camp. Elsewhere there were local shops selling common groceries, candy and tobacco. Ran Bahadur, the eldest brother, owned one such shop, which was one of the most successful shops of its kind in the sector. Vivek attributed the success of his brother to the fact that he carried much of the wares there himself instead of hiring someone to do it and did not charge for the transportation. His wife also

worked in the shop, which would make it possible for him to run errands and resupply the shop himself, among other things. He also gained many customers by having a “buy two, pay for one” deal on paan. Another thing was that he had much more things in stock than other shops and handled people’s remissions by phone. I often found him sitting in his shop on the phone with western union or MoneyGram, reading account numbers and the like, while handling customers and cutting guava nuts all at the same time. I rarely saw him sitting down without being busy with some task or another. One time he showed me his kitchen garden where he grew several types of vegetables. Beside the hut, he had built a platform with roof for sitting under. It had several blankets and men used to come and play cards, chew paan and smoke for long periods. Sometimes, instead, children would sit there and talk and play, but they would usually have to make room for seniors if it was time for cards. Mostly the men that came there were regulars, so it was almost like a social club or a bar in that it created a loose community others could join for a game of cards, a smoke or a chat. Though I did not investigate thoroughly, I got the impression that stakes at the card game were generally low and friendly. Sometimes Ran Bahadur joined for a few hands himself.

One evening, one of my informants asked me to join him and go around collecting the electricity bill with him. The situation was that the refugees were technically not allowed to have power lines going into the camp, but almost all had it anyway. The law was not enforced, he told me. From the first day I was there, I had thought that they had the same access as elsewhere in the district. Nepal has generally poor access to electricity because of frequent power cuts, called load shedding. It is meant to save power and it causes lights to go out every few hours and stay dark another few. It is supposed to follow a schedule, but in practice, it just comes and goes at seemingly random times. The power in our sector of the camp came from one of the farms, where the refugees had to help pay the bill. We went the rounds and talked to a few families and collected some money in a pot, then headed back to eat supper.

3.7 Roaming

Roaming, in nepali called gomnu, was a common activity for youth in the camp (as it probably is most places) when there was no work or school. Instead of just hanging

somewhere, they just walk about the camp picking up friends as they go and mostly do not do anything specific. It is, simply put, something to do when there is nothing to do. Of course, it is not merely a case of passing the time, but also a relation-building activity that has great value for refugee youth even if it is economically profitable. Often, they would end up somewhere they could play carom board⁴ or visit a friend to listen to music or watch a movie. From what I observed, roaming as an activity was more common among boys than with girls, who mostly visited each other at home. What I think is the important part of this nothing-doing is the distance from the controlled and hierarchical environment of the home and the more fluid connections with friends in the act of walking, thinking and talking. My friend, Sudip, explained the importance of movement to me one of the first times I visited. We were sitting in his hut when he invited me to walk with him to one of the nearby farms where they had helped him and his friends when he was younger. I asked why he needed to go there and he told me there was no reason, but walking was the only way to think properly and the best way to have a discussion. The prospect of imminent and potentially permanent separation from the group of friends gives this a new dimension. While it is the logical result of the system of migration moving family units together, it simultaneously creates a sense of urgency for people, especially youth, to spend time with friends before they resettle. This was something parents understood and was somehow compatible with the concern parents sometimes expressed that their children would lose their sense of belonging to the Bhutanese refugee community. In this sense, the act of roaming with friends had a similar sense of urgency as the Miteri tradition I discussed earlier. Youth could therefore sometimes use resettlement effectively as excuse to go and spend time with friends. Moreover, the act of walking liberated them from the static, almost prison-like nature of the camp by creating a space through movement. This space incorporated more of the camp than the immediate surroundings of the hut and the routes of daily work. The incorporation of large parts of the camp displays and reinforces membership of the group as a whole and not just the family unit. While this all seems to be in the interest of the refugees' sense of unity, there were also many problems associated with roaming. The main source of concern was the lack of productive and useful activity bordering on dangerous idleness.

⁴ A popular south-Asian game played on a powdered table where the rough object is to flick your chips with your finger into the opponent's goals. Like advanced air-hockey, but requiring no electricity and more strategy.

3.8 Harvesting Guaa

One day, Ganesh came and told me I should go to Ran Bahadur's hut. He had asked if I wanted to join and help him and some others pick guaa for making paan. Guaa is the local name for Areca nut, which is a kind of nut that grows high up in palm trees and are harvested before they are ripe and rolled in betel-leaves with a slab of lime powder and chewed. Sometimes it is mixed with tobacco, sweets and spices for extra taste. The finished product is called Paan or Betel Nut. The nut is bitter and makes your saliva red, making it easy to see if someone has taken paan if they smile. The nut is eventually spat out or alternatively chewed to bits and swallowed. Both men and women chewed paan, but it was probably more by men. Small children did not chew paan, but youths down to the age of 15-16 did sometimes. It was often characterized as an unhealthy and bad habit, albeit not as bad as smoking cigarettes. The teeth of the people who chewed the most paan turned red in the grooves that formed on them. The first time I saw paan was when roaming with Jiwan and his friends. We stopped outside the small family shop one of his friends. One of them ordered paan for all, me included. The chewing of paan was cool. It was something you should learn to like be more like the adults in spite of them saying that it is a bad habit. The visual expression of the paan-chewer was a bulge on the lip, red saliva, red tongue and, eventually, red teeth. Its great prevalence in the camp may be in part to the image it carries with it, and be an example of cultural hegemony in the sense of cultural taste (Bourdieu, 2013). Given that it was a cheap and popular snack, it was an object of communal identity and socialization, around which time could be shared and ties of friendship was created, maintained and regenerated.

Selling paan was an important part of Ran Bahadur's business, and I was happy to be invited. The harvest would be my chance to do some work and see how the popular chewing nut was harvested and prepared for sale. This kind of harvest would take place every three or so months over a few days to a week at a time. The key was to maximize the amount of nuts collected on a short time so he could get it back fast, do the rest of the work with the harvest and do other things. Some of the nuts are cut up and sold as they are and some of the greener ones are buried in a big hole in the ground to ripen and later picked up. Ran Bahadur had been getting the permission from several farmers to collect the guaa from the trees on their farms for a small fee. This initiative came as no surprise, as he was otherwise very entrepreneurial-minded. He constantly had multiple projects going in addition to his shop and employed the help of many people in his projects. In this way, he gave people, especially

youths, something to do. Picking the nuts is hard work and to make it faster, Ran Bahadur brought three other guys plus me. Krishna, Roshni's husband, and their son came with, and so did Ran Bahadur's neighbor.

The first day the others had gone before me and Ganesh came to show me the way. They had gone to some of the farms in the close vicinity of the camp, but most of the farms were located a few kilometers away across a dry river. In the middle of it, locals were digging for sand in the riverbed they could sell. Because of the scorching sun, they had set up screens to protect themselves. Looking down the river, I could see several such screens and some trucks to load the sand. After crossing the river, we came to some farmland and passed some fields where a refugee I recognized from the camp greeted us as we passed. He had like many other refugees, taken a temporary job on the farm for the harvest, the others said. We passed through Madhumalla, a small town where Vivek and I had once gone to buy a gas canister. We continued to a more forested area with many small farm homes where most of the guaa trees were. People had them in gardens and around their fields.

From Ran Bahadur's house, we had brought a very long bamboo stick with a scythe attached firmly to the thinnest end. This was the tool used to cut down clusters of guaa. We then picked off the stems and put in the bags. Removing the stem was time consuming, but saved a lot of space in the bags. The mode of transport was bicycles, so being able to load as much in the bags and then loading as many bags as possible on the bikes was important. Had they had a friend with a pickup truck, the logistics would not have to be this precarious. However, when I naively asked why they did not just rent one, Ran Bahadur told me that renting a truck from someone would be too expensive and unnecessary since they had the bikes and the time to do it anyway. The pressure to harvest as much as possible in the shortest possible time was contrasted with the notion that it somehow also was a way to pass the time.

Cutting the guaa from the top of the palms was work of endurance and precision. Sometimes the clusters are hidden behind the leafs, the falling cluster may get stuck or fall on your head, They may be too high up so you have to hold the 8 meter long stick as high as you can without the support of your stomach or feet. Sometimes there were roofs to climb on to get better access. Often the clusters were inhabited by colonies of large red fire ants who got enraged by the chaos and attacked our feet and hands when we tried to remove the nuts from the stem. The other guys seemed to be used to these ants and laughed when I got bitten and jumped around. Roshni's son and the neighbor sometimes climbed about 10 meters straight up the

trunks of the trees and collected clusters if using the scythe on the pole was impractical. They insisted I should try it too, which I unsurprisingly failed at miserably.

As the time passed, I noticed how I was gradually brought in to the group by being given tasks instead of being an observer. At first, they did not expect me to do anything, so I just started doing as they did. At first, I only collected the nuts from the clusters that had dropped down. When I got quicker, I could pay attention to their search for clusters and discussion about which ones to pick and how. I then got to try cutting them down, which was very difficult. For the most part, Ran Bahadur or Krishna did that job, but Ran Bahadur sometimes insisted I should try on the high ones because I was a little taller than they were. At the same time, he and the others started to tell me to “go fast” when I was picking, asked if I had ever done such manual labor before. We kept going from farm to farm, picking guaa until there was no more space for sacks on the bicycles and it was getting dark. Ran Bahadur would usually go a bit in advance to greet the farmers and exchange pleasantries, at which he seemed very adept. Sometimes we were even offered tea, juice, oranges and litchi. The third day we were out, I went with Roshni’s son and the neighbor a few hours in before Krishna and Ran Bahadur joined us. This meant that they had left us the full responsibility to find and collect the guaa for a while. They later joined us and we carried on the rest of the day. After working all day in the burning sun, it started raining in sporadic but heavy showers, making the loading of the bags on the bikes harder.

Pushing the bicycles back home was challenging for me because of the weight of the many large sacks. It was very hard to keep the bicycle steady on the bumpy roads. After falling over a few times, Ran Bahadur told me he would take over. He argued that I had an unstable stance unlike Nepali people. Europeans, he claimed, walked like drunkards, shifting their weight from side to side. Despite this, he made a point of me pushing the bicycle the last part going into the camp, saying it would let people know that I had indeed been working. This notion of proving work mirrored the insistence of our middle brother, Vivek, to take photos of me cutting bamboo, helping to repair Moma’s hut and doing various other tasks. The difference was that the pictures were not meant as proof for others in the camp but for the people he envisioned having sent me there from university and for my family. On reflection, the importance of being seen to do work resonates with how the multiple roles of the unemployed man examined by Cato Wadel were employed as reserves to have something to show for in lack of a job, or reservoirs to be stored and then brought back up when the time was right

(Wadel, 1991). Granted, this case was different in that the picking of Guaa was proper work and went beyond the actual harvesting of the nut. The Guaa had to be classified, stored accordingly, and prepared for sale. Even with all that in mind, the workload seemed a far cry from what I imagined the sand diggers in the dried river endured. If that was the kind of work they had to compare their own activity with in order to build reservoirs of legitimacy as hard workers and deserving recipients of aid, they had a lot to live up to. In addition to being seen to do work, he filled another role by providing many people with paan, a valued and popular commodity.

After we came back, Ran Bahadur's wife, Nari Maya invited all of us for dinner. She had made dal bhat with fish curry for the whole work crew. Fearing that Bachala Maya would expect me home to eat there, I told her I should get home first. She rejected this idea and explained that doing so was unnecessary. It was their responsibility as they had employed us. We all sat down and ate together. This was exactly what happened when we helped to repair Moma's hut with the help of several other people. The entire work crew were given food. It was one, but not the only contribution by the women. When we repaired the hut, the women also partook in the manual labor, but it may be worth to remember that hut repair is done in and around to the home itself, traditionally a female sphere.

3.9 Food and Household work

When dealing with the importance of work for camp refugees, it is important not to ignore the work that is done within the household, mainly by women. Being male, few if any expected me to know the first thing about cooking, though I was allowed to help cutting vegetables and such. Men cooking was something I saw mostly in preparation for ceremonies and feasts where large quantities of food were prepared. Not only were gifts of food a way to display hospitality and gratitude, it was also a medium to connect family otherwise separated in huts placed in the grid-like structure of the camp. The huts being centered on the foreign idea of the nuclear family unit, frequent visits and dinner invitations served to maintain family ties. The three brothers' huts were very close, but Roshni's was about 15 minutes' walk away, because brides move in with their husband and his parents when they marry. Despite the relatively long distance, Roshni or her husband Krishna made daily trips with their little

daughter to visit the rest of the family. In addition to cooking food, spinning wool for sale, crocheting and watching infants were chiefly done by women. Washing clothes was, however, a task for the individual. Bachala Maya or Vivek would normally only wash the clothes of their six-year-old son, Madan. Being a young boy, he had no specific tasks except grudgingly finishing his food. This changed when he started school and got homework toward the end of my stay, but eating up remained something of a chore for him. To his parents' dismay, he would only eat his rice and few other things. The parents worried because he was a little small for his age and tried to convince him to eat other, more nutritious food. Sometimes he tried it, but if he did not, he was free to eat only what he liked. He also took breaks from eating to play during the meal. The flexible rules might have to do with gender roles giving more freedom to boys, but also the way food was eaten in general. In daily life, food was consumed in a practical non-formal fashion. The women sometimes ate their food in the kitchen right where they made it. Vivek and I often ate together with Madan, sitting on the floor or on small stools using a bed as a table. There seemed to be little emphasis on sitting together as a family for the actual eating, but rather the taking of food from within the family. In the morning, Bachala Maya used to give 'super-cereal' to me together with my morning tea because she knew I was used to eating breakfast earlier than they were. Sometimes she made soup with chickpeas and onion. There were traditional ways of eating. Sitting cross-legged and eating with one hand, men did not hold the plate but should leave it on the floor while eating. It was also the norm not finishing your plate unless you wanted a refill, showing appreciation for the food by saying "Namaste" to the cook with hands together. Though these things were meaningful on their own, the most important thing was to show up for food at certain times of day. I learned this from having failed to notify my family before accepting spontaneous invitations from others. Cooking was a matter of love and a matter of pride.

It was common for people to go to other people's huts to eat dinner unannounced or on short notice. Therefore, as Bachala Maya told me, they always make more food in case of visitors. It is also an important part of Nepali hospitality to offer something to eat for guests. As Vivek put it: "Our guest is like our God". Making more food than necessary – was necessary. If there was anything left over, the pigs got it.

In our hut, Asmita usually helped her mother in the kitchen. She being the only daughter still living in the house, she would usually be the one called to help even if she also was the only one with homework from school. However, this did not stop her from performing very well at

school, something her parents frequently pointed out with pride. Her school had one year awarded her with a big English dictionary for scoring highest in her class on tests. She had received several such rewards. It probably helped having former teachers for parents, but if a head master I interviewed is to be believed, the main problem causing results to drop in late years is lack of motivation brought on by the resettlement process. He told me that the kids lacked discipline because they received remittance from relatives who had already resettled. This clearly helped the refugees economically, but the funds that often came earmarked with candy for the kids left them without any incentive to study hard to get a job. Before, he explained, kids would have to make an effort to deserve such a treat. The gifts had thus deprived parents of a positive incentive to use for their kids. He also claimed that the UN-imposed 'learning without fear' policy prohibiting corporal punishment, though morally good, was problematic because the schoolchildren were used to what he called 'learning with fear' in the home. While such punishment was prohibited everywhere in the camp, schools were in effect the only place held accountable.

3.10 Two kinds of stigma

While there was a significant stigma against long-term idleness, there was also another kind of stigma. There were many who expressed negative attitudes against those of the refugees who did not live within the confines of the camps. The two most important factions in the camp were the pro-resettlement and repatriation supporters. While an image frequently was conjured up of a united opinion gradually shifting from repatriation to resettlement as the first people started to resettle, there were also those who would rather integrate in Nepal. Some got Nepali citizenship by marriage, but the Nepali government has not accepted any families as part of the resettlement program. Local integration were by some described as the worst solution, almost as treason, since it neither would classify them as Bhutanese citizens proper nor as refugees with claims to Bhutanese citizenship. It would, in effect be to admit that the Bhutanese government was right in calling them illegal immigrants who should go back to Nepal where they supposedly all came from. On the other hand, since the resettlement had begun, this view could be more acceptable as it could potentially be part of resettlement. One form of resistance against Nepali integration was the stigma against refugees living and working outside the camp for long periods. One time we were going down to the Bazar, we

met a highly educated woman who had recently experienced such stigma. She told me she had not lived in the camps for many years because she had worked in Kathmandu. She had just come back because she had to stay in the camp for the resettlement process. Because of this, her neighbors were less than welcoming toward her, viewing her as an opportunist who somehow did not deserve resettlement because she, and others who worked long term on the outside, had not suffered and languished in the camps as they had. Liisa Malkki talks of this kind of ostracism by Hutu refugees from Burundi (1995), where refugees who traded with local Tanzanians were regarded as impure partly because they were denying the importance of categories separating them as a group from the locals. In contrast to the Burundian case, however the reactions of the Bhutanese refugees were primarily concerned with living in the camp, and not so much with connections to the local Nepali population.

4 The Devil's workshop

Rootless youth and mental depression.

4.1 Introduction

“You know what they say: Idle hands is the devils workshop”

– A refugee man talking about bad behavior in Beldangi.

A man living nearby had hanged himself, people said. We should go to his family's house. His body laid outside for neighbors and friends to see, watched over by his family. A crowd of people stood about the house and looked. The police had placed a guard with a rifle nearby to keep the order. I had just come back to our hut with Jiwan from the camp gate where I had taken pictures as busses had left in the early morning with some of his friends. Still carrying the camera outside the dead man's house, I kept some distance to avoid giving the impression that I was there to take photos. “Are you not going up there? Don't you want to see?” a man asked. “Not really” I said. He seemed surprised. People were gossiping about what had happened to the man and why he would commit suicide. The Camp Watchman Team had apprehended him for stealing and taken him to their office. Some believed that it was the people of the CWT that had hanged him because he was Christian. One of the other things I heard was that he might have struggled with mental depression and decided to hang himself.

A big issue that is sometimes under-communicated or in different ways concealed in the camp is mental illness. Though people talk about it in terms of gossip, talking to others than close family or friends about having such problems was a taboo (Chase, 2012). In her report on psychosocial resilience in Beldangi, Liana Chase (2012) makes the interesting observation that:

“in a context where voicing emotional suffering goes against the grain of cultural etiquette and exposes one (and one's family) to the possibility of damaging stigma, idioms of vulnerability may serve as euphemisms for psychological distress that would otherwise go unrecognized.” (Chase, 2012, p. 13)

A few of these “Idioms of vulnerability” were “Remaining idle, Staying in the home all day, Thinking too much.” (Chase, 2012) These were things commonly talked about. Especially the idleness as a problem. However, I also found roaming to be an important activity talked about in a stigmatizing way. While the importance of keeping bonds in groups of friends while there

was time was a factor making roaming better than complete idleness, youth or other people, who were “roaming here and there”, were not doing anything useful with their time and were therefore susceptible to drift towards all kinds of malice. From discussions with several older people, I gather that many of the refugees conceptualized mental depression as a probable root for many kinds of social problems, such as crime, aggression and conflicts. When a man in the sector had hung himself, many were quick to mention the possibility of mental depression as the probable explanation.

4.2 Signs of mental depression

I learned a few things about Nepali body language during my stay. One such helpful fact is that Nepali people generally avoid expressing anger or bad feelings. Often, they will mask such feelings with smiling and laughter. This can be very confusing for a westerner for example during any kind of argument. People who wandered around much, or were otherwise disconnected from their family were treated as vulnerable to mental depression. One should be careful with being together with them too much. The underlying bad mood or bad habits could be contagious. Anyone often seen laughing or expressing excessive happiness could be struggling with mental depression. Though laughing and expressing happiness was in no way forbidden or dangerous, one should be careful not to be too excessive. Being in an unstable mood was worse than just being in a bad mood.

One of our neighbors often came by for visits. He had a wife and a kid, but no work. He often wore uniform jackets with belts around them and showed off strength by doing push-ups or helping people carry water. Kids thought he was funny because he goofed around, imitated Bollywood comedians and was in a seemingly constant happy and joking mood. His performances were that of a clown. Another person that expressed more happiness than usual was a young man who helped with fixing Moma's hut. He was very energetic and took few breaks. He often started laughing at strange times and Vivek joked that a guy like him probably had volunteered his help for free or for food only, though he knew he had some sort of agreement with Moma. Similarly, another neighbor helped Ganesh to build his new bamboo cage for pigs. He constantly joked and sang songs, sometimes making up his own words to known Bollywood songs. Ganesh had brought some music on his mobile phone, and

when we had finished constructing the floor platform, the funny man got on top of it and started dancing, shouting and laughing at passing cyclists and other passersby. Despite their overt and loud displays of joy and euphoria, all these men were elsewhere described by others as possibly mentally depressed due to their whimsical behavior. In one such case, a new perspective on the spread of Christianity in the camp emerged from a conversation about religion.

4.3 American heaven

Luis was a young man who came to visit several times, loudly throwing compliments and expressions of gratitude in all directions. He said he was very happy that I was there and wanted me to visit his church or his hut. His hair was bleached and he had the so-called Korean cut and, unlike many others, he enthusiastically spoke in English, completely unfettered by others correcting or just laughing at his numerous errors. This only made him happier since he was spreading joy that way. Whenever he came by, Bachala Maya would offer him tea, for which he was very thankful. Vivek might ask how he was doing and what he was up to today. Jiwan knew him, as they went to the same church and he would laugh at his jokes, his stories and funny behavior. After he left, however, the adults would tell me that I should not go with him or listen to what he said, as he was not good people. He hung out with thieves and vagrants and should not be trusted. They had bad habits. Sometimes when he came by, they tried to say that I was busy and could not come with him. When I was sitting with him in the hut soon before I left, he talked about the church and Christianity. He had just told me about the greatness of Jesus and his sacrifice, whereupon he told me that for him, America was like heaven. At first, it sounded like just his usual overly enthusiastic view on life and things in general, but then he told me why: He explained that in the afterlife, you go to heaven and meet your family again. His family had been resettled to America some time ago and, in some time, he would go and join them. This was something he dreamed of and waited for with great expectations. In the same sense, the refugee camp was his vision of hell. He made sense of the refugees' situation through biblical cosmology. The importance of reuniting with the family in giving meaning to the circumstances also reflects the notion of family as the main source of social support, meaning, guidance and happiness. Religion as a coping strategy was one of several things mentioned in the Chase report as beneficial for

refugees by promoting positive emotions and social support, noting that Christians, anticipating being resettled to 'Christian countries' feel an added positive impact of resettlement (Chase, 2012, p. 25). Whether they later feel an equally great disappointment in finding that not everyone defines himself or herself as Christian in the west is something we have yet to find out.

The death of the Christian made many people angry. Specifically, many Christians believed that he was a victim of prosecution against Christians in the camp. Vivek came to me and said that the APF had deployed to the CMC and had made a line to keep people from going there. The reason was that somebody had attacked the small CWT hut and torn down one of the walls. There were many people shouting and throwing stones, he told me. The Sub-section heads had been told to discourage people from going there because of the potential danger. There had been a case where the police had shot a refugee protester before. That time, a mob had gathered around the CWT where a refugee leader was hiding, he had become extremely unpopular because he had accepted the offer of resettlement. The angry mob had set fire to the hut and the police, having failed trying to disperse the crowd, had shot into the crowd and hit one of the protesters. The crowd then dispersed and the leader's life was saved. The young refugee who was shot by the police did not survive however.

Even though I had been in bed from being sick all night and morning, I decided that I had to go to look at what was going on, and Vivek told me he would join me to go there. When we arrived there were large crowds on all sides of the CMC area, but keeping their distance about 200 meters away from the center where the Police had formed a long line dressed in full riot gear. They looked menacing and ready for anything. The crowds we saw first did not seem agitated at all though. They looked more as if they were curious and wanted to see what the fuss was about, just like us. I brought with me my camera, and when some people in the crowd saw me, the focus went from the police to me. They laughed and wanted to pose for the camera. These were mostly teenage boys. We went across the main road and moved in a wide flanking maneuver to the backside of the CWT office hut. The back wall was almost completely destroyed. I tried to move closer, but Vivek warned me that the police could get annoyed and maybe take my camera or even destroy it. We went further around the CMC area and crossed a small stream to stand among some trees. There, we ran into Bishal, who was also out to see what was going on. We stood there talking for a while. Then, suddenly, someone shouted something angrily from further down on a bridge. A big stone flew through

the air, but hit nothing. The Police just kept calm. It was evident that the most drastic things had already happened and this was not going to escalate any further. We stayed for a while, and then went to visit a teacher instead. I will not speculate in what really happened in this instance, but the upheaval that followed clearly showed that there were some strong emotions tied to the treatment of Christians and the motives of the CWT volunteers. Not everything was peace and harmony between the religious groups in the camp, although it often seemed that way from a distance.

4.4 Digging a ditch

For about a week, leading up to a small mental breakdown, and loss of face on my part, I had been behaving in a way comparable to the people described as having mental depression by other people. At the time, I was too occupied with the actual participation and observation to consider how others might think of me in this way, but looking back at the notes, the days can be described as arbitrary and unstructured activity aimed at helping anyone and everyone, roaming around in an effort to find new people to talk to and interview. This is similar in essence to behavior people described as signs of mental depression. Saturday, which is the last day of the week, I came back to the camp from a trip to my house in Damak. The water pump was on and people flocked there to fetch water, drink or wash. The water flows for two hours non-stop and the excess water goes into a ditch dug between rows of huts like a small stream. The stream crosses the road dividing sectors by the water pump. This was a busy intersection where people walked and rode bicycles. Therefore, the ditch had flattened out so water flowed out on the road, making it muddy and hard to traverse with slippers and water cans. Therefore, I asked for a shovel and started digging a little canal across the road after fetching water. People waiting to get water from the pump were amused by this. They laughed and commented on my progress. Ran Bahadur's daughter later came out and offered to take over. I just finished the work myself however, as she was quite young. After doing that, I returned to find Vivek with his wife and daughter cleaning the plastic cans they used for getting milk from the farmers. Because the cans were so hard to clean properly, Bachala Maya had put boiling water, sand and disinfecting leaves in them. We then had to shake the cans thoroughly.

The next day, I was sitting by the houses and one of our neighbors came and invited me to come with him to a Buddhist wedding. Some people go to weddings all the time, because everyone is invited, there is free food, music and dancing. While it was normal to go to weddings of acquaintances and neighbors and the like, my friend pointed out a few people who used to go to all the weddings, which he told me was a strange thing to do. In the wedding, I got acquainted many new people. I met an albino refugee whom I later went to visit and a man dancing a traditional Buddhist wedding dance with a wooden mask. He told me it could be his last performance because he was going to Baltimore. Later that day, Damber came by the house and invited me to come look at his new rabbits. Then we went roaming for a while until the sun was down. The day after I visited the man dancing with the mask in the wedding. I helped prepare dinner and to repair our neighbor's roof. The following days, we were picking guaa as described in chapter 3. Ganesh had invited me to join them. The days were long and hard.

4.5 Losing face

Jiwan had gotten himself a set of old stereo speakers. He had been playing songs off his mobile phone as loudly as possible and often gone out to roam with his friends, leaving the music on. This did not seem to bother anyone particularly, as there was generally a certain level of sound in the camp during the day anyway. Moma always listened to the local radio station shouting news and pop songs from morning to the evening and many people would play loud music from 5 am in the morning since it was expected that everyone were out of bed by that time. Sometimes Jiwan even fell asleep with his mobile playing music on his pillow. Although I found this a little annoying, it made me feel a bit like his big brother getting up and turning it off without waking him. Interestingly, none of the others in the hut would do anything about it. Ever since a Hindu festival in which all the noisy roosters in the camp had been sacrificed and eaten, there had been silence at night. The roosters had not cared much about the time, waking us in the middle of night and had lived only a paper-wall away.

The seventeenth of May is the national day of Norway, and is one of very few times in the year that people deem appropriate to display one's pride in Norway. This happens through

music, flags, national costumes, traditional dancing and most importantly children's and citizen's parades. As I had recently been wandering the camp and getting Jiwan and his friends to show me that they could sing both the Nepali and the Bhutanese national anthems, I thought that it would be in a good idea to play some Norwegian songs from my mobile and see if anyone responded to it. I connected the phone to the speakers, as Jiwan was out, and played the national anthem at what I deemed to be a reasonable volume. I felt, predictably perhaps, a little bit homesick. I was also rather tired because I had been working quite hard for 3 days picking guaa with Ran Bahadur and the others. As I thought it was a one-day job, I had really made an effort to show that I was capable of doing more than writing notes and drinking tea. Keeping up the strenuous work for two more days was a challenge, and it felt good to have finished and to take a break.

As I sat there on my bamboo bed, listening to the now foreign-sounding words, reflecting on how it would feel if it was my nationality that was taken away instead of the refugees', Vivek came and told me that the neighbors had asked if I could turn down the volume, as they were watching a Bollywood movie in their hut. This neighbor was actually kansha daju (our brother Ganesh) and his wife, but at the time, I did not know. For all I knew, it could have been some neighbors I did not know, that went out of their way to silence this noise. Obviously, they knew nothing about the significance this day or this song had to me, but nonetheless, it gave me a lump in my throat and a chill down my spine. My national anthem was not welcome here and it came in the way of other people's lives. I turned it off and sat for a while in the bed looking out the window thinking. I noticed tears starting to run from my eyes. I felt stupid and selfish for thinking about my own homesickness when these people had been thrown out of their country. That just made it worse. Was the homesickness I felt invalid because their problems were more important? At some point, Vivek came back and told me that I did not have to turn it off, just down. I said it was ok and that it was not that important, at which point he noticed that I had been crying. At first, he did not know how to respond to this unexpected behavior, and offered me a glass of water and asked me to try to control myself. I knew that it was inappropriate to show emotions this way in public all across Asia, so I agreed with him. He came back and asked me why I cried and I told him it was the national anthem. He was surprised and apologetic, telling me that had he known, he would not have asked me to turn it down. In fact, now he wanted to hear it himself. I told him it was just me being silly and exhausted after 3 days of picking Guaa in the burning sun and pouring rain. He insisted, however, so we listened to a song and I explained its meaning. This was not

the first time he had been interested in hearing about where my homeland. One time he had said that after having waited for three years for DHS⁵ approval for US resettlement, he was considering if maybe resettling in Norway was their destiny now. Both him and Ran Bahadur had asked me about where I thought would be best to go for them.

What struck me the most about this incident was seeing how understanding Vivek was after I told him that I missed my home country. The possibility of this being a point of resonance for him, in the sense described by Wikan (1992), is something I recognized only later. However, I would not pretend to have gained any insight in the refugees' thoughts and feelings because of this experience. It only shows that the memory of one's home country is a valid and recognized category for acting out of mask, if only for a little while. Although Vivek was just a teenager when his family left Bhutan, I thought to myself that he might know more about missing home than I ever would. Over the next days, Vivek helped me plan my days and even arranged for me to meet headmasters and teachers of schools, in case I had any queries about the school system. I was also finally able to help him making bits of coal for the oven from the pulverized coal from India whereas before, he would tell me that he would do it and I should write or something. This probably was because of the dirty nature of the task. Ganesh also asked me to help cut down a banana tree that had collapsed and hit the tiny shop where his wife, Moma and Sabina sold chatpate⁶. Before, he would probably have just done it himself. If it was my work for Ran Bahadur, my sudden homesickness or just gradual integration in the family that happened is hard to know for sure. With time, I came to understand that the reason for them to give me more work could have something to do with the understanding of mental wellness and resilience being connected to keeping a busy schedule.

4.6 Crying and the problem of venting

Although crying is seen as lack of control over emotions and disruptive for social interaction, it is not unheard of in certain situations in the camp. An important feature of the bus departure scenes that happened every other week by the entrance of the camp was people crying. There are often many tears and sad faces when dear friends and family members leave Beldangi to

⁵ US Department of Homeland Security

⁶ A type of fast food made in a bucket and served in newspaper wrapping with a cardboard spoon.

an uncertain future in a distant country. It was not certain that they would ever see each other again. For many, their new life has many challenges and travelling to visit relatives will be hard. Even smaller distances are a huge difference from the closeness in which people live in Beldangi. It is not hard to understand the severity of such a situation. Crying is then a powerful display of affection for the ones who leave. At some of the departures I attended, however, I could see very few people crying, even though others told me on my way there that there was definitely going to be many people crying. It is not just a practiced ritual but also an assumed performance. In the very action of assuming lies another performance, however. Within it, the idea that families are emotionally torn to the degree that they no longer can control themselves when they are separated is reproduced and reinforced. In the terms of Goffman (1959), the bus embarkation area is a front stage where a famous tragedy is played every time the busses leave. Even though the performance is not always on, that is what it is known for to the spectators.

Another example of this is the tradition of the bride's mother to cry at the end of the wedding when her daughter is literally carried away together with the groom. Equally important is the duty of the bride not to smile or in any way express positive emotion when she leaves. This is in respect to her parents she is leaving. The only time I witnessed this was in a wedding where the couple were both over 30 years old. Marrying at that age is very unusual. My friend, Bishal, who invited me, said that they were a good example for the community in this regard. He explained that too many were arranging for their children to marry at a very young age like 15 or 14, despite it being illegal. As the ceremony where friends have to carry the married couple on their backs was comical, the bride laughed and the mother did not cry when they left in cars. To compensate for this breach of tradition, the bride's brother both theatrically and ironically started sobbing loudly. The response was more laughter from the many guests. This breach and play with tradition still acknowledges the existence of said tradition and thus reminds all of the underlying feelings presumably latent in the situation.

4.7 Throwing stones in the dark

For the camp inhabitants, the living environment consisting of the huts, the strict grid network of roads, the ration warehouses and the villages and farms around the camp presented a constant reminder of their problematic circumstances and limitations in life. Difference from surrounding communities accentuates the liminal and vulnerable nature of the refugees as a group. These reminders thus constitute a permanent threat to the mental balance and health of the refugees that needs to be kept in check by a number of factors, including close family ties, eating enough and at the right times, an active and productive schedule, and staying away from conflict, criminals and other bad influences. All these things are granted extra importance in the face of camp life and resettlement. In keeping with the ideal of saving face and avoiding conflict and confrontation, a semi-secret reaction to late night squabbling was enforced. Privacy was limited in the close quarters of the camp and having to listen to loud quarrels at night, like other bad influences, could threaten the mental stability and harmony of the people in the whole neighborhood. If it persisted, some people would go out at night and throw stones at the roof of huts where there was a quarrel going on to make them stop. Vivek explained that they only threw stones in the dark of night, as being spotted throwing stones was equally belligerent and unhealthy behavior possibly leading to losing face. Sending the message by stones was a more anonymous, non-confrontational business. It was known that stones could be coming through the air to land on the roofs and around the huts of people who were arguing loudly at night. An added effect of this was that the argument could be made, as it was for me, that the danger of stones hitting your head, not the quarrel itself, made it too dangerous to move close to the hut and check it out. The practice thus had a double effect: it gave the quarrelling household a message to keep quiet, and it gave people the tangible threat of a stone landing on their heads, leading them to avoid going there and getting involved in the fight and potentially taking intangible mental damage from the disharmony associated with quarreling.

5 Refugee National Identity

Refugization and Resettlement. Creation of an extranational people.

5.1 Introduction

The world we live in is largely conceived of as being a family of nations. The nation-state is the central organizing category for most people in the world. The categorization of refugees puts them in a liminal space between nations. Because of this, they present a permanent problem for the national order of the world. A testament to this is the fact that being outside the system is considered a problem, the responsibility of which, falls on the organization called the United Nations. Keeping in mind that “people [refugees] categorize back”:

“Refugees are constituted, in Douglas’s sense (1966), as a dangerous category because they blur national (read: natural) boundaries, and challenge “time-honored distinctions between nationals and foreigners” (Arendt, 1973, p. 286). At this level. They represent an attack on the categorical order of nations which so often ends up being perceived as natural and, therefore, as inherently legitimate.” (Malkki, 1995, p. 8)

The refugees are living between two different lives and worlds in what is both a non-place and a cultural hub of the diaspora, directly through experiences from Bhutan or indirectly through written stories and anecdotes about the past, the Bhutanese refugee community maintain a double set of ideas of what is important in their current situation. On one side, they have always wanted to go back to Bhutan. On the other side, the situation has made it impossible to achieve their goal and therefore many think it is best to go as refugees to start a new life in the western countries.

There is a considerable generational gap between those that have experienced life in Bhutan themselves and those that have only heard stories about what was their homeland. This gap is significant, with many bridges across and varying depths. The difference is, as can be expected in all societies, most prominent between the old people that still have most of their years in Bhutan and the young people who were born refugees or were too young to remember at the time of the exodus. The Bhutanese refugees are between existence as the Nepali minority in Bhutan and Nepalese society. At the same time, they are constantly made aware of their future being in America, in the broad sense of the word. The word America was often used by refugees as an all-encompassing entity to describe where they were going.

Despite the fact, which people are keenly aware of, that many will also go to Canada, Australia and other smaller western countries, they are all collectively referred to as America. Despite their seemingly rootless situation, there exists a strong sense of sameness in the camp community. The question that emerges is how this sense of identity is created and recreated. How is it connected to their past life in Bhutan and the life in exile in the camps? What does it look like for the ones that have resettled and are starting a life on the other side of the world?

5.2 Defining identity

To show how different performances produce a sense of national identity, one must first establish what national identity is. Moving beyond essentialist explanations and building on process oriented (Barth, 1998), and performance oriented approaches to ethnic identity, I argue that national identity is shaped in relation to perceptions of other persons and groups by daily activity and interaction. Moral ideals are inherited from the social environment where a continuous negotiation is performed.

For the ethnically heterogeneous Lhotshampa population from Bhutan, citizenship status takes precedence over blood ties when talking about national membership. Emphasis is therefore put on the multicultural nature of the nation and historical ties to family-owned land in Bhutan. Many refugees therefore proudly keep their identity papers safe, even if the government of Bhutan does not recognize their legality. Other important anchors were time and work invested in that land, loyalty to the King, and generations of ancestors having lived there. Frequently, people brought up the argument that all inhabitants of Bhutan are immigrants. The Lhotshampa came from Nepal and the Drukpa people came from Tibet. This argument was meant to lend legitimacy to the refugees as citizens of Bhutan. In doing so, it also justifies their status as refugees and separates them from the Nepalese citizens of the local community surrounding the camp.

5.3 Cultural maintenance and remembering – a bridge over an expanding gap

There are countless ways that children as well as adults learn and recreate the memory of Bhutan and the life before they left. Both formally, in the form of learning Dzongkha in school, history lessons, through books, symbols like the Bhutanese flag and theatrical performances, and informal conversations where stories are shared that reflect the deep feelings of having been persecuted and deliberately removed from their own farms and villages to a life in exile and toil. Since the land they ended up in happens to be the place where their ancestors came from, and where they speak the same language and follow most of the same traditions, an additional important factor is distinguishing themselves as a separate entity from the local population around the camp and in the rest of Nepal. Often I would hear warnings not to trust locals and rather come to the camp people. Though they would also say there were bad people in the camp who I should watch out for, they would retain that on average, the Bhutanese were more trustworthy. The current unstable state of Nepali society was often a subject of discussion. The state of Nepal was widely seen as chaotic, economically stagnant, and plagued by corruption and foreign interests. The civil war, the abolition of the monarchy and the political bickering over government posts, while failing to create a constitution where things that were brought up. Using such examples, they could distance themselves from the national Nepalese, emphasizing the superior stability, education system and social welfare of Bhutan among other things. A general feeling of pride in their homeland combines with the implicit bitterness of not being welcome there anymore. This makes for a seemingly complicated relationship with their national identity. They may be more or less proud of their nation in different contexts. One thing about Bhutan that many people in the camp hold dear is the royal family. Pictures of the old king who recently abdicated and introduced democratic elections, pictures of the new King often with his beautiful wife at their wedding. It is worth noting, however, that many also had pictures of the Nepali royal family on their walls. My family included. We would discuss the circumstances of the royal massacre that occurred in 2001, Vivek pointed out the few that survived, and what secrets might be hidden from public view with regard to the official story. This was a ubiquitous topic of discussion in both the camp and elsewhere. Everybody has his own version of what really happened, but no one believed the official story. This personal interest in the Nepali royals suggests a certain feeling of connectedness to Nepal, but only to a degree.

Certainly, few of the refugees in the camp would call themselves Nepalese and not Bhutanese. There was, however, times when people would refer to themselves as Nepali when talking about old times in Bhutan to distinguish themselves from the dominant northerners, commonly called the Drukpa, and the Sharchop (easterners) in the north-east. In Bhutan, they were referred to as the Lhotshampa, which means southerners in Dzongkha. Ngalong is the term used for northerners of the Drukpa majority. Its meaning differs from the others in that it does not refer to a geographical position but seniority.

“Ngalong is a term which appears to relate to the origins of the ethnic group to which it applies. Popularly, it is taken to mean ‘First Risen’, in the sense of the Ngalong having been the first Bhutanese community to adopt Buddhism; an alternative etymology has it that the term is a corruption of Ngonglung, ‘ancient region’ (Pommaret, 1997:47)” (Hutt, 2003, s. 4)

The linguistic emphasis on the majority Drukpa as the original inhabitants of the country puts all the others in a separate group where they arrange the other groups in geographic position in relation to them. Asserting identity for the Lhotshampa is, as a result, a complicated matter balancing the connection to the official national culture promoted in Bhutan, and the distinct Nepali traditions, language and lifestyle of the Lhotshampa.

5.4 Generation gap

A substantial part of the population in Beldangi was younger than the camp itself. For those who had never lived in Bhutan and those who came at such a young age that they have no memories of it, the aspect of going back is an abstract idea and not tied to personal experiences from actually being in Bhutan. Living as their parents lived in southern Bhutan is as foreign to them as living in the camp was for the parents when they left. The camp and its surroundings are the things with which they have grown up. That is where they have gone to school, met with their friends and spent most of their time. The extraordinary circumstances of refugee lifestyle is what normal is to them, all the while being reminded of it being a temporary and undesirable place to live caused by an injustice to their people. They learn about their history, but unlike the older generations, have no personal memory of the places and events. They learn Dzongkha in school until 8th grade, yet they have never been forced to learn or know it, except in schools in the camp. This dissonance is an important factor in the direction the refugees lean as a political body with regard to the resettlement issue. Not just

the young, but people of all ages are affected by this generational dissonance. As time progresses, the proportional amount of people always having lived in the camps keeps growing. Someone who was 3 years old at the time of the exodus would be 26 years old at the time of my fieldwork. Anyone below that age could hardly remember much from Bhutan at all. This group only keeps growing proportionately to the rest of the refugees.

5.5 Sanichare Children's Theatre.

One day Ganesh and I went to Sanichare to visit his wife's family and to buy a piglet to bring back to Beldangi. He had planned to go and work as a teacher elsewhere in Nepal, but had decided to stay and get another pig to rear instead. He invited me to come to Sanichare with him. Phul Maya could not come because she was feeling ill. We visited many family members there. Nearby the hut of one of Phul Maya's uncles, there was a culture school where children of different ages were rehearsing a theatrical play. This was in a weeklong break from school, when the kids had spare time. We went there, sat down and had a look. Music was playing and some of the older youths were walking in a circle, looking at each other with a threatening glare. They were all holding weapons such as water pistols and hammers. Suddenly the music changed and just as everybody got in a position to hit or aimed at one another, the scene froze in time and a girl came in from one side and held an emotional speech about peace and reconciliation. When she finished, all dropped their weapons. Others then brought large homemade Bhutanese flags onto the stage. The small children also sat down among them carrying small flags. They then sang a song in Dzongkha. I was told that it was the national anthem. The scene then ended with a round of applause. This play, along with movies made by refugees reenacting atrocities in Bhutan are examples of the political position generally attributed to the refugees as a group. While resettlement was well under way and a blurry consensus around it was building, the primary goal was still repatriation to Bhutan and to be recognized as citizens with equal status there.

5.6 Christianity as assimilation?

The Bhutanese refugees as a group, like their Nepali neighbors, are religiously diverse. The family I lived with identified as Hindu, which is the biggest religion. Some others in the Rai ethnic group are Buddhists or follow the kirat animist tradition. The eldest daughter had been married a year earlier and they showed me the DVD they had commissioned to be made of the ceremony. It was a traditional Hindu wedding; similar in many ways to others I had attended earlier. Bachala Maya was perhaps the most devout, fasting every Friday for Santosi Mata. She told me that she prayed at her bedroom altar every morning and upheld many other traditions. Surprisingly, the eldest son in the household was a recently converted Christian. Jiwan sometimes went to a church just outside the camp where the pastor was a refugee from the camp. His cousin next door also said she was Christian. To symbolize this, she once had a friend tattoo a crude Christian cross on her arm. Her mother was Hindu, however, and they kept a ubiquitous sign made out of three tall sticks in the ground outside the hut to symbolize belonging to the Kirati people. The latter sign, however, seemed more an expression of ethnicity and tradition than of religion. The two youths were both about 16-17 years old, came from Hindu families and they knew that they would soon be going to America to resettle. The parents did not seem particularly bothered by their breach of traditions. Some even claimed that they just pretended to be Christian as an expression of style and personality.

Style was an important pre-occupation for youth. It can be seen as a combination of appearance and performance. Many people, especially youth, colored their hair and got fancy haircuts, clothes and jewelry. When I was there, a particular fad was called the bleached 'Korean cut' for boys. Some publicly showed off their taste in music by playing it loudly. Like youth elsewhere, they express themselves. This could serve as a reminder that refugee youth are not frozen in time and space but partake in streams and flows of fashion and style like anywhere else. For some, Christian religion could be understood as part of this self-expression as a kind of youth rebellion.

One significant difference from the areas outside the camp was the relatively high number of Christian converts inside. There may be many reasons for this, including the fact that Christian missionaries target the refugee camp instead of going other places, or the vulnerable and uncertain situation the refugees live in. What I found, however, was that it could be part of a wider attempt at self-assimilation to what they perceive to be a western lifestyle. This self-assimilation, the urgency of which is enforced by the process of resettlement and stories

of assimilation practices in Bhutan, could be seen as a way of making sure they will finally be integrated in a bigger society. A society unlike Bhutan and unlike the camp. In Bhutan, there had been a broad campaign using various means to enforce Bhutanese culture on the Nepali population, like making traditional dress mandatory and removing Nepali language from schools (Hutt, 2003, s. 170). When talking about his son and his Christian beliefs, Vivek was rather resigned, commenting how the kids these days do all kinds of things. He also tied this to his grand theory that the Christian world are trying to grow its population for the coming third world war against Islam personified by Osama bin Laden, though he was already dead at the time. In this context, Nepali people and Hindus come in between and have to choose a side eventually. Variants of this idea was something I heard from several people in the camp and outside. The idea reminded me of Huntington's famous "The clash of civilizations" (1993) which has been very influential in several political circles. The idea that the world is divided into large cultural groups that will unite in blocs and ultimately clash may seem like a good explanation to why Christians and Christian relief organizations are so actively involved in the life of the refugees. The supplier of building materials and educational materiel are the Lutheran World Federation and Caritas international, which is associated with the Catholic Church. It is worth noting that their mission in the camp is strictly non-religious.

The cultural implications of Christianity should not be overlooked by attributing every aspect of conversion to religious conviction alone. There were several churches around the camp set up specifically to serve the refugees. Missionaries came to help the congregations grow, though sometimes under the pretext of just "visiting my friends" as one American from a church group put it when I asked what he was doing in the camp. There were also smaller churches inside the camp who have services that last for several hours with singing songs of a distinctly western sound with simple rhythms and harmonies contrasting the musical soundscapes of Indian and Nepali tradition. The lyrics were Nepali. Christian groups often had guitars to play Christian songs. One of our neighbors who was Christian had a guitar with the slogan "The wages of sin is eternity in hell" written on a sticker, leaving no doubt about its elevated purpose.

When I visited the Bhutanese Biblical Church outside the camp, a group of young refugee children was sitting on the floor singing songs. It was a Sunday school. Two refugee girls in their teens led the group. The kids sat in rows on the floor and recited things the older girls said and singing songs. Some of the songs had a lead singer from among the younger kids and

some involved them playing on rhythmical instruments. The older girls then asked them questions and told them things about the Christian religion much like the teachers at the schools. The primary mode of learning was through repetition.

After ending the session, they talked to me about their resettlement status and their wish to study in the future. One of them told me that she wanted to become a scientist after resettling. Their aspirations went far beyond the camp and were not related to religion, but an intense interest in the west and the possibilities going there could involve. She did ask me if I was Christian, but my answer seemed to go right past her. She was more interested in asking more questions about western countries and education systems. Her interests were not related to religion, but the western world. The church, more than just a place of worship, was also a vessel of western culture. By the pastor's podium, there were some typically western musical instruments like a keyboard, electrical guitar and bass and a set of drums. Many of the kids stayed and eagerly played on them after the meeting itself was over. Later that same day, I left Beldangi in the style of refugees going for resettlement: with a tika in my forehead and some symbolic coins tucked in my hand when I left.

5.7 The visit in Cleveland

A hot day in late June, a little over a year after I had left Beldangi and the family hosting me, I found myself on a train station in Cleveland, Ohio. I was finally coming to visit my refugee family who had been resettled in the US only months after I left. Both Vivek and Bachala Maya had gotten jobs and the kids were at school. They were all away from home when I arrived, so they had arranged for a neighbor who was also Bhutanese refugee to welcome me. When the man noticed me walking around the housing blocks looking for the address, he explained the situation and welcomed me to sit with his parents while I waited. He had some business elsewhere. His parents were old and did not understand much English, but were really nice and gentle. They gave me tea and cakes and seemed interested and surprised that I knew some Nepali language. The old man had been waiting for me at the train station, but I was late and he had returned a little earlier. His wife sat in their living room watching a reenactment of the Hindu epic Ramayana on their TV via YouTube. I recognized the part with Hanuman moving the mountain from the dinner with the jumping doctor in the camp.

The kids first came home from school, and later the parents came from work and welcomed me back into their home, which was no longer a three-room bamboo hut but a three-room ground floor apartment. Soon we were eating Dal Bhat and curry like before, and talking about the year that passed. Still using our hands to eat, but now sitting on chairs by the table, not cross-legged on the floor. They had bought several things they did not have in Nepal, such as a couch, a fridge and stove, a TV, a laptop computer. What surprised me most was that they had been able to buy a brand new car using money they had saved up mostly from their business in the camp and getting a loan with their new job incomes. Their economic situation was better than it had seemed. They had a frugal lifestyle and sense of clear goals such as saving money for college for their kids. They still cleaned their clothes by hand in the bathtub even though there were coin-operated cleaners in a room on the floor above. They worked long days and nearly always ate Dal Bhat at home, which is a cheap dish compared to most American food. They had even arranged to buy meat like in the camp where they could save some dollars by buying a whole animal and chopping the meat themselves, the bone included.

Vivek had found a job at a factory restoring train engines and Bachala Maya as a seamstress at a protective clothing factory. Both had to commute to get to work. The three kids all went to school but had some days off for summer when I was there. Asmita claimed that her little brother almost spoke more English than Nepali, whereas before he knew just a few words. It was clear that they had been through a great many changes in every aspect of their lives in the past year, but the most important part of life for the parents still seemed to be work and providing for the family. Their time was dedicated to the welfare of the family and very little for themselves. The children spent most of their time with friends either in the neighborhood or online in the intangible space that is Facebook and other social media. The amount of time spent commenting and clicking the like button on friends' pictures and status updates was staggering. This was especially true for Asmita, who seemed to take breaks only due to fatigue or interruptions. Maintaining an active and popular online presence was hard work.

While I visited, Vivek had a visit from a colleague at work. He had invited him over to watch a world-cup soccer game on TV and have some food and beer. The man was a manager at the factory and maybe in his forties. He was one of few non-refugee friends they had so far. He was full of praise for the job Vivek did at the factory and for their hospitality. He told me that many of the employees at the factory were from the refugee community and that he had positive experiences working with them. Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio have some of the

largest concentrations of Bhutanese refugees in the world. In terms of integration, avoiding ghettoization of minority groups has long been a goal for a successful process. The policies affecting immigration and asylum seekers vary from country to country, but it is widely seen as positive if immigrants socialize with members of the host community. At the same time, the refugees have their own set of bonds and ties that has been a very important part of life in the refugee camps. There are many good reasons to maintain this community and balancing specific group ties with integration in American mainstream culture and society is the issue of the moment for the Bhutanese refugees in America.

One day, Bachala Maya had brought a letter home from work. It was an invitation to a picnic and a baseball game at a stadium in the city. It included free food and soft drinks. It was a company get-together for the company she worked for and she could bring family members. At first, she said that she would stay at home and we could go with her tickets. I felt like that would be wrong, so I tried to convince her to come with us. In the end, we all went there. The picnic was under a large tent where long tables with benches on each side were put out so many people could get room. We had gotten there really early, but had looked around the stadium before we found the place. We ate and talked to a few of the colleagues that knew Bachala Maya. After eating, the game started, but we only saw a small part of it. None in the family was really interested in seeing Baseball. When we first had gotten there, Vivek had said that maybe someone had already taken our seats. I asked a man who looked like he knew the place and he could tell me where we should go to find the right place. Asking for directions did not seem to come naturally to Vivek. I worried a little that he was afraid to contact strangers for things, something that would help greatly but for getting the information and for getting in contact with people outside the refugee community. Although there were many non-Bhutanese living in their neighborhood, it seemed that contact between the different groups were minimal.

In the weekend, Vivek, his two sons and I went fishing with the refugee neighbor. We brought some fishing rods and went to a river by a parkway bridge. Because he had a new car and recently taken the licence test, Vivek drove very carefully and slowly. The sun was shining and several other people were out to try their luck in the river. After trying to get fish for a while on both sides of the river, we went for a walk along the park. The place reminded me of the area outside Beldangi where we used to take walks close to a stream. When we left, we had some small fish that would become dinner later.

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Appendix: Abbreviations

AMDA – Asian Medical Doctors Association

APF – Armed Police Force

CMC – Camp Management Committee

IOM – International Organization of Migration

LWF – Lutheran World Federation

RCU – Refugee Co-ordination Unit

TCR – Third Country Resettlement

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WFP – World Food Program